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GREAT TEXTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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UNEXPECTED REVELATIONS OF GOD

By JOHN C. LAMBERT, D.D.

UNEXPECTED REVELATIONS OF GOD

"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not."—GENESIS xxviii. 16.

THERE are few of the incidents in the lives of the Old Testament patriarchs that throw so deep a spell over us as this narrative of Jacob's dream from which our text is taken. Many of us can remember the glamour we felt in childhood when we heard this story told, or saw the scene it described embodied wonderfully before our eyes in a picture-book. And even yet, although the rich lights of a child's imagination have faded from our sky, we must confess to the peculiar fascination of the ancient tale.

We read how Jacob, having gained by guile the birthright and the blessing, and having been compelled in consequence to flee from his brother's vengeance, lighted in his journey upon a certain place, and tarried there all night because the sun was set; and how he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. So far, everything is quite simple and natural. But all at once the mystery of the super-

natural falls upon the scene. The weary pilgrim has sunk into slumber, his head pillowed on the stones, his upturned face pale in the starlight, when suddenly the heavens open and a flood of mystic light streams downwards and falls upon the earth by his side. As we gaze with dazzled eyes, this radiance takes the form of a ladder, with beings of celestial shape gliding up and down its gleaming bars. And then we are conscious of another light, brighter and more awful—a light at which we dare not look—shining from above; and we hear a mysterious voice, in keeping with this mysterious vision, giving to Jacob that glorious promise for himself and for his seed and for all the families of the earth through him.

Was it a dream only? we ask. It was a dream; but it was that kind of dream which is not all a dream. Jacob knew, when he waked in the morning, that God had appeared to him in the night. "Surely the Lord is in this place," he said; "and I knew it not." And then deep thoughts of reverence filled his soul. The place seemed dreadful in his eyes: it was the house of God, the gate of heaven. And Jacob took his stony pillow, and set it up as a consecrated stone of memorial; and he called the name of that place "Beth-El"—"The House of God."

We may regard Jacob's first words on awaking as disclosing to us the true nature of his dream. It was a revelation of God: "Surely the Lord is in this place." But it was an unexpected revelation: "The Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." The

words suggest a wide subject—the subject of God's unexpected revelations; but in order to limit and guide our selection of particulars, we shall consider this subject only in so far as it seems to be illustrated by the case before us. We shall think of Jacob's dream, in various aspects of it, as an illustration of unlooked-for revelations on the part of God.

I.

God sometimes reveals Himself unexpectedly in the world of nature.

We hold that in this dream there was something distinctly supernatural—that there was a divine communication to the mind of Jacob; that he was actually conscious of the words of that promise, and knew that the promise came from God. And yet, in spite of this supernatural element, we must remember that it was a dream, and so, like any other dream, was due to natural causes. It is a familiar fact that for the outward form taken by our dreams we are often indebted to the things that lie about us in the natural world. The last and most vivid impression which that world has made upon our senses is not seldom the mould into which the imagination of the sleeper pours its liquid fancies. Now what, may we suppose, were the last impressions received by Jacob before he fell asleep that night? As he lay down to rest he saw above him the overarching vault of night throbbing with innumerable stars. Many a time had

he seen that sight as he looked out from the door of his father's tent; but now it had a different aspect to his eyes. Now he was all alone—alone with God and nature and the night. The solemn stillness of this hill-country brought a sense of awe and mystery to his heart. Those stars so far above him, what were they? Had they any connection with the invisible God whose throne was set beyond them all? They seemed to quiver with life, almost to look down with compassion in their shining eyes upon this lone and weary pilgrim. Perhaps they had some spiritual being of their own, perhaps they were themselves angels whom God had bidden to shine forth in the darkness to cheer and guide all pilgrims of the night. Such thoughts as these may have passed through Jacob's mind, thoughts natural enough to a member of a primitive religious race with something of the child's heart within the man's. And still, after his eyes were closed, the vision of glory kept shining on before his inward sight. The milky pathway seemed to stretch farther and farther into the dark immensity above, and at the same time to come nearer and nearer to the earth on which he lay, till it rested like a ladder by his side—a ladder that he now saw to be crowded with bright angels; and at last there came that awe-inspiring voice. It was undoubtedly the voice of God speaking to Jacob's soul; but it came in a dream, and it may have been the outward aspect of nature that made the dream take that wonderful form.

This, of course, is a mere fancy; but it is perhaps a legitimate way of exercising our fancies in trying to discover the natural elements that wove themselves into the texture of the patriarch's dream. But it is no fancy, brethren, when we say that God does sometimes reveal Himself in the sphere of nature as unexpectedly as He revealed Himself to Jacob. We know not what nature is; but we do know that it is not mere dead matter, as the materialists tell us. We know that what we call the material is in some way related to the spiritual—that it is related in the first place to our own spirits, since it has no existence for us otherwise, and but for this relativity could not come within the sphere of our consciousness at all; but that it is also related to some other and greater Spirit whom we call God, seeing that we cannot account for its existence in any other way, but are compelled to think of it as having the essential ground of its being in Him.

There have been men who continually have realised this spiritual aspect that nature presents, who every day have beheld therein as in a glass the glory of the Lord, who have seen in the light of setting suns another light that never was on sea or land, or have been moved by the sight of the meek mountain daisy to thoughts that lie too deep for tears. Such unfailing insight and emotion belong to men of special endowment. But even for us ordinary people, who are not gifted with the poet's eye or the poet's heart, Divine revelations flash out

now and again from the world of nature, compelling us to say :

"The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains—
Are not these, O Soul, the Vision of Him who reigns?"

There is a gospel, as Jesus said, in the lilies of the field ; the very stones cry out and preach us sermons whose unfailing text is God. The heavens declare His glory, and the firmament showeth His handiwork ; day unto day proclaims His majesty with a clarion voice, night unto night whispers it as a mysterious secret. To everyone who believes in God at all there comes at times the consciousness that the glorious world that lies around us is nothing less than a revelation of the Divine Spirit, so that he feels constrained to cry, "Surely the Lord is in this place ; and I knew it not."

II.

God reveals Himself unexpectedly amidst the ordinary surroundings and occupations of our lives.

We are apt to cling to the old superstitious notion that in order to draw near to God it is needful to sever ourselves from life's common duties and surroundings. But the Bible lends little favour to any such idea. Jacob's vision was not granted to him at a spot that had previously been accounted

holy. He was at Luz—an obscure locality to which he had chanced to come. "He lighted," we read, "upon a certain place." Nor was he engaged in any sacred observances. On the contrary, he was travelling on foot through a desolate region—a very prosaic and secular occupation. But it was in that place, and while he was thus engaged, that God drew near to speak to Jacob.

The same lesson comes again and again from the Divine revelations of which we read in Scripture. Moses was tending his sheep amidst the rocks and furze of Horeb, when God appeared to him in the burning bush and taught him that that mountain side was holy ground. The disciples were standing half-naked in their fishing-boat, worn out with the long night's fruitless toil, when they discerned someone standing on the beach; and the disciple whom Jesus loved said unto Peter, "It is the Lord." Saul of Tarsus was riding on horseback through the fierce sunshine of the Syrian noonday, when that brighter light from heaven shone round about him.

And what does all this teach us? Not, surely, that Bethel and Horeb and the shores of Tiberias and the Damascus road are holier than other places; but that every place is holy, that every duty is sacred, since God is present everywhere, and at any time, in any circumstances, may make His presence felt. He will turn a Luz into a Bethel, a rough fishing-boat into a temple of the Divine. He is not with the pale monk in his cell more than with the busy toiler on

the world's highways. He is not present in the church and absent from the market-place. The gate of heaven is nearer us than we think; at any time it may open, and God may reveal Himself to our hearts. For He is with us day and night, at home and abroad, by land and by sea, in the stillness of the desert and in the streets and lanes of the city. Oh that we had a more abiding conviction of God's continual presence, and sought more diligently, in every thought and word and deed, to abide continually with Him.

III.

God reveals Himself unexpectedly in the hour of loneliness and trial.

Jacob had hitherto been dwelling in his father's house. He was his mother's favourite, and as he had nothing of his brother's roving spirit, he had seldom been far beyond the reach of Rebekah's loving care; so that he would feel his desolate and dangerous situation all the more. He was alone in the wilderness: the hard ground his bed, the harder stones his pillow, and around him all the terrors of the night—the dread of the sharp fangs of some ravenous wild beast, or the vaguer dread of unknown possibilities of evil which solitude and darkness so readily beget. And yet it was then and there that God appeared to Jacob. This lonely pilgrim learned that God had given His angels charge

concerning him—that he was verily waited on by ministering spirits, who were ever going up to tell God of his wants, and coming down to supply them.

It sometimes happens that separation from the friends and familiar scenes of home tends to banish God from the heart. We are so much the children of habit, that our very thoughts of the Divine Being depend more or less on the continuity of our outward relations. And there are some persons of whom this holds true to such an extent, that their God resembles the old household gods of a Roman hearth, which were left behind when men went upon a journey. At home such persons are religious, after a fashion, by the mere force of custom. The familiar sound of the Sabbath bell calls them to their usual pew. They go to church because others are going, and because it has been their habit to go also; though when these external compulsions are removed, the thought of God immediately begins to recede towards the vanishing-point in their minds. But to one whose religion is not a mere tissue of habits but a thing of the heart, it can never be so. Banishment from home only makes him go deeper down into his nature to discover the true sources of his faith in the Divine. The outward props of religion are taken away, that the true living roots of it may be realised. And often it is just when the painful sense of loneliness is strongest that God comes nearest to a Christian's heart, constraining

him to say, "I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

An emigrant has made his way to a strange and distant land. The Sabbath dawns; but here are no Sabbath bells, no familiar faces of those whose sweet counsel he used to enjoy and in whose company he went up to the House of God. A sense of blank misgiving comes over him, as though he were living now in a Sabbathless and Godless world. But he takes down his Bible from the shelf. He reads some grand old Psalm that tells of God as the dwelling-place of His people in all generations, or a chapter in the Gospels that reminds him of Christ's promise to be with His disciples all the days even unto the end of the world. And as he reads he is lonely no longer, for he becomes conscious that God is with him here and now, and that Jesus Christ is his heart's indwelling guest.

Or take the experiences of a sick-bed. It is a time of banishment from God's House and from all the benefits of social worship. And yet how often it happens that to those who are bereft of these outward privileges God comes with the fullest revelations. The dark cloud of pain and sorrow is transfigured into a glowing and a guiding pillar. The fiery trials, by their very heat, bring out into clear view the invisible writing of God's promises to the soul. Our "stony griefs," as the hymn says, become, like Jacob's stony pillow, the altar of the Divine presence, the very Bethel of the soul.

Or think of the last, dread experience, when the pilgrim comes to the passage of death's cold river. How awful is the solitude of that hour—a solitude into which no human society can possibly break. Kind friends may stand around the dying man; loving, tearful eyes may rest upon his face; warm hands may hold his chill ones in a clinging grasp that almost seems to say, "I will not let thee go." But amidst it all the pilgrim into the unseen must always feel that, so far as any human companionship is concerned, he is stepping forward all alone. And yet it is in that dreaded solitude that God sometimes reveals Himself most plainly. The bed of death is transformed into the gate of heaven. Angel faces smile before the closing eyes; and as human voices fade away, the dying Christian hears another voice, saying to him, as it said to Jacob long ago on a night of loneliness and fear, "Behold, I am with thee . . . for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

IV.

Once more, let me say, God reveals Himself unexpectedly in the hour of spiritual abasement.

It may seem a pure assumption to say that this revelation came to Jacob in such an hour as that; but in saying so, we are only arguing along the lines of God's unswerving spiritual laws. Jacob had sinned grievously. He was fresh from an act of

shameful deceit, seconded by several deliberate lies, and aggravated by the fact that his victims were his only brother and his aged father, now smitten with blindness and infirmity. Now, was a man upon whose soul such sins lay hot and unrepented of a possible subject for such a revelation of God as we read of in this chapter? Not unless all the laws of man's relation to God were completely disregarded in the case of Jacob. From the very fact that God appeared to the patriarch with this gracious manifestation of Himself and promise of His favour, we conclude that Jacob must have been full of contrition for his sin, that he must at that very time have been passing through the painful struggles of an awakened conscience and a penitent heart.

Yes, Jacob had sinned deeply; but he would have been a callous sinner indeed if he had had no pangs of compunction when he heard his father's reproachful voice and his brother's exceeding bitter cry. And now all the afflictions that had befallen him—his enforced flight, his banishment from home, his lonely journey, the dangers by which he was beset—these afflictions had engraven deep upon his mind the solemn lesson that the devil's wages are always very hard, and had worked in him that godly sorrow which leads to true repentance. Jacob, we might say, had been wrestling with God in the secret places of his soul, even as Nathanael had been kneeling before God under the fig tree when Jesus promised that he too, like Jacob, should see the heaven

opened and the angels of God ascending and descending.

There is nothing that makes us seem farther away from God than a heart-felt sense of sin and self-abasement. But it is when a man is in the very depths of self-condemnation that the light of God's countenance breaks upon him like the day-dawn following the night. Look at the Penitential Psalms. What a consciousness of sin is there; what a depth of genuine humiliation! And yet it is just when these psalmists are crying out of the depths that the assurance of Jehovah's pardoning mercy and love spring up within them. For it is when hearts are broken and contrite that the High and Lofty One stoops down to visit them. Contrition and humility are the true foundation-stones of godliness, and the lower these foundations are sunk, the higher will the towers and pinnacles of the Divine Temple rise within the soul. One of our poets has taught us to say that "men may rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things." And in the gracious counsels of our God there is a blessed provision whereby the very sins of the past, if truly repented of, may become stepping-stones to heaven—another Jacob's Ladder by which His children are raised above their sin and selfishness, up the steep heights of holiness, and into the very presence of the Father.

And now, *to sum up all that has been said:* Our God is ever with us, ever ready to reveal Himself to us;

in every scene of nature, in every duty of life, in society and in solitude, in sorrow and in joy, in our sin and in our penitence—nearest to us sometimes when He appears to be farthest away, coming to us continually when we least expect it. The whole round world is a Bethel, for God is present in every part of it.

And yet the world is never a Bethel to those to whom the Divine presence is not revealed. And before that revelation can come we must have the inward eye to discern it. May our Father-God Himself open the eyes of our understanding and enlighten the senses of our hearts, so that wherever our pilgrim steps should lead, we may find there a spot on which we can raise an altar, and call the name of that place "Beth-El"—"The House of God."

THE GREAT MARKET

By J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

THE GREAT MARKET

"Buy the truth and sell it not, also wisdom and instruction and understanding."—PROVERBS xxiii. 23.

YOU will probably say this is not a gospel text. It certainly does not come with the familiar ring of evangelistic addresses, which declare, and rightly declare, that God's truth and God's salvation are gifts, not bargains—the gifts of unbought, unmerited grace. To talk of buying the truth is much the same as to talk of buying God's forgiveness and Christ's redeeming love, and of course that cannot be done. The highest things are not marketable; they are, like the wine and milk of which Isaiah wrote, "without money and without price."

We have reason to thank God for that every hour of our lives. It would fare ill with most of us if truth and wisdom were like other rare commodities, rare pictures and books, jewels and diamonds, only purchasable by the highest bidder and the fullest purse. Happily, there are a few things not yet on sale. The almighty dollar is not quite almighty; neither is the almighty sovereign. The power of money, though enormously great, is limited, and does

not yet control the whole field human and divine. You cannot buy brains and genius, however much money you have; or the poet's vision, the artist's touch, the ear for music, and the gift of song. You cannot buy a good name, a stainless reputation, an easy conscience, or a pair of honest eyes. You cannot buy a big manly heart, or the faith of a little child. You cannot buy happiness; above all things, it runs away from the possessor of millions. You cannot buy a good man's trust or a good woman's love; still less can you buy self-respect, or the right to pray, or a place in Christ's living Church and the inheritance of His saints.

All these things are quite outside the market. You cannot woo and win them with a shower of gold, as Zeus won Daphne in the old Greek story. If it were not for that, we should all eat our hearts out in envy of the millionaire; the very saint would forget God in worship of Mammon, and we should all be a thousand times madder than we are in pursuit of the yellow metal. God saves us from that, by writing on all the best things what you sometimes write on cheques: "not negotiable"—not to be had by the biggest purse and the richest bribe.

You cannot buy God, religion, the secret of a quiet heart, and the hope of glory. These are God's free gifts, offered impartially to every child of man. They are like the summer sunshine, the glory of a spring morning, and the splendour of an autumn sunset, which lavish their beauty without stint upon all.

No buying them, only taking them in, enjoying them, and giving God thanks for them if you have grace enough for that.

Notwithstanding, these words from the Proverbs are profoundly true, and they are sound gospel as well. "Buy the truth and sell it not, also wisdom and instruction and understanding." The highest things have to be bought, not with money—indeed, they are above price; but you cannot have them without cost, expenditure, sacrifice. To buy is to give up something that you value in exchange for something that you desire more, covet more, and perhaps need more. It is right, then, to say that all good and divine things must be bought. Our great Master likened the kingdom of heaven to a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. And the Apostle Paul, quite in the spirit of that parable, declared that he had suffered the loss of all things to win Christ—that is, he had sold all the other things to buy Christ, and got Him cheap at that sacrifice.

That principle runs all through life, in things great and small. There are few things worth having and worth keeping in this world which can be got on cheap and easy terms, and, I should think, none at all in the next world. You cannot win a prize in an examination, a football match, or a race, without toil, sweat, or even blood-drops, and sometimes a broken bone. You cannot win the heavenly race without

laying aside—that is, selling—some of the earthly weights; and a well-known verse reminds that you cannot mount to higher things save on stepping-stones of your dead selves.

That is the universal law. There is always a *quid pro quo*. You must lose to gain. No cross no crown. As Christ bought us, not with silver and gold, but with His own precious blood, so we have to buy Christ, not with money, but with some part of our own flesh and blood. For we cannot have Him and keep Him, unless we give up something of our own base fleshly self in following Him and kneeling at His feet. People tell you thoughtlessly you can have Christ and have salvation for nothing. It is not true. You cannot have Christ without giving up many a dear desire, lust, and sin. It is costly to be a real Christian. It is costly to be a good man. All these things are bought.

In fact, we are always buying and selling. Shakespeare wrote: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players"; but far more truthfully might we say: "All the world's a market, and all the men and women buyers and sellers, and every day is a market day, and every evening brings its balance-sheet, showing the things bought and sold, with the nett gain or loss." Foolish people are always selling the better things for the worse, as the silly youth Moses in the *Vicar of Wakefield* sold his father's horse for a gross of worthless green spectacles. Wise people are always buying the precious and

enduring things at the cost of that which they can more easily part with. And therein you have a good definition of the wise and foolish. The foolish sell the substance to gain the passing shadow. The wise sell the shadow to gain the eternal substance.

Now, let me briefly enumerate *some of the things which we must all buy before they can be ours.*

I.

First, there is what this writer calls wisdom.

We have all to buy that, for it can only be gained in the school of experience, and the fees in that school are high. Wisdom is never inherited, never bequeathed or transmitted from father to son. Everyone has to buy it for himself in a dear market. This writer, in the preceding verse, counts the father happy who begetteth a wise child; but that is impossible. His child may grow up into a wise man, but he is never born wise. A man may be born clever, talented, a genius, a poet; he may be born rich, heir to an estate, a title, or a throne; but he is never born wise. He has to buy that at a big price. Some of our young people may be a great deal smarter than their fathers, much more up-to-date, as they say, and by virtue of their superior education, far more knowing in book matters. But they cannot, in the nature of things, be quite as wise as their fathers, unless, indeed, the fathers are mentally deficient; and

even then, there is at least a probability that the sons will take after them; because wisdom can only be acquired in the rough and painful school of experience. The buying of wisdom writes wrinkles and furrows on our faces, and heavy lines of care on our poor hearts. We buy wisdom with many a rebuff, humbling, and disappointment, with costly blunders and heartache, sad hours, and sometimes a bit of heartbreak. We are buying wisdom all our lives, and it often only comes to us as the end approaches. That is the pathos of life. We often wish that we could have the wisdom sooner, before the twilight creeps on. It would make our lives so much happier and more useful; but it only comes in time to use the greater part of it in the higher service, where, no doubt, it will be needed. Well might this writer say: "Buy wisdom." We have all to buy it.

II.

It is equally certain that we have to buy character, reputation, and an honoured and trusted name.

There is no market in the world where these can be picked up cheap. You can buy a tawdry reputation, a short-lived popularity or notoriety, at a very costless price, just as you can buy sham jewels for a few coppers from any pedlar in the streets. But to win a name which will keep its white, stainless honour through the wear and tear of years; to win

the enduring respect of *good* men (and there is no other respect worth a straw); to win the daily and the final "Well done" of the Great Judge—that is never a costless business. It means the persistent climbing of the rugged hill duty; it means the daily fight with temptation; the daily treading down of self-indulgent ease; the daily sacrifice in the service of friends and fellow-men; and the constant plodding on in the straight path, swerving not to right or left through evil repute and good. If you cannot face that music and endure that discipline, you will never win the prize. The good and honoured name does not drop into our lap as a gift of fortune. It must be dearly bought.

III.

Nay, I think we have to buy every Christian virtue—self-mastery, generosity, charity, and, most of all, that virtue of patience which the Bible extols in nearly every page.

And the Bible means by patience not merely silent submission under suffering, but the *nil desperandum* spirit, the unconquerable spirit of endurance and trust, the courage which presses through a host of difficulties, the hopefulness which never fails in saddest hours, the fidelity which holds on to a good cause through all its defeats, sure that it will win in the end. That is the patience of the Bible, and it does not come easily to any man. It rarely comes in

early life. It is the result of discipline and the bearing of hardship. A man has many a time to fight down the coward rebel in his heart, and wrestle with himself in many a chamber of prayer before he acquires. Patience, like every other virtue, must be paid for.

IV.

Moreover, we have to buy, as this writer says, truth—that is, among other things, truth-speaking and honesty in action.

Some of you know that it costs you more than a trifle to be strictly truthful and honest in the ordinary affairs of business and life. Some people will tell you that it is impossible to carry on business successfully on those lines; that to have a conscience too nice, too fastidious, too scrupulous, is to ensure failure. I do not believe them. They say it to excuse their own crooked dealings. But this much is true: that a man who is determined to play the game according to God's rules of the game, determined to be severely truthful and honest in every detail, can only do it by suffering occasional loss. It costs him something for the time. I have the utmost sympathy with those in business who are every day tried and tempted, and have to make sacrifice for their integrity. I can only remind them that the end is worth the cost, and that the Master said, "If any man will come after Me, let him take

up his *cross daily*." It means a little of the cross every day, but with more of the crown and the joy. You must buy truthful lips, an honest heart, and a good conscience; and you cannot either gain or keep them unless you are willing to pay the price.

V.

Yet one thing more at least we have to buy—the higher and richer experiences of Christian life.

Some good people talk smoothly, and even glibly, about the life of holiness, "the higher life," as if it could be reached easily by a simple act of trust. It is not to be attained in that way. It means sacrifice. The higher life always means giving up things we like and love for the sake of God and our fellow-men. The religion which costs you nothing either in time, thought, labour, or money, is not worth picking up in the streets. Most people pay as much for their religion as it is worth, especially if they pay very little, because in that case it is worth so little. The Bible cannot be God's book to you, full of rich teaching and comfort, unless you take the trouble to read it often and prayerfully. You cannot understand the helpfulness and mighty power of prayer unless you steal time from your manifold engagements, to commune with God in prayer. You cannot enjoy the communion of saints unless you sacrifice

your petty prides, snobberies, and mighty regard for class-distinctions. You cannot realise the sweets of divine forgiveness unless you renounce your grudges, unreasonable dislikes, and your own unwillingness to forgive; and you cannot have Christ as your companion and comforter unless you every day try to do not your own will but His. Every advance toward the higher life involves sacrifice. It costs nothing to descend; it is always costly to ascend.

VI.

In fine, every good man buys every bit of good and truth he has. And then, as our text declares, he sells it not.

And that is almost more important than the other. It is hard to buy the truth, and easy to sell it. It is always easy to sell the best and highest things. In the ordinary market the rule is the other way: it is easy to buy, and hard to sell. Everybody welcomes the buyer, meets him with respectful salutes and almost kisses. The seller is often sent off with a churlish no. But in the moral and spiritual market, it is hard to buy and easy to sell. There are always numerous buyers bidding against each other in their eagerness to buy what you are prepared to sell. It is easy to sell one's spiritual birthright for a morsel of meat. There are scores of Jacobs lying in wait ready to help you to

that transaction. It is easy to sell your principles and convictions for some paltry bribe, some pecuniary or social advantage. It is easy to sell your veracity or your honesty, to make people think more highly of you, or to secure additional gain. It is easy for young men to sell all their chances in this world and the world to come for the excitements of the drink-shop, the betting-ring, and the lewdnesses of the streets. It is easy for young fools to sell the Bible, the faith, and all the truths for which the martyrs died, just to gain the cheap reputation of being modern, up-to-date, independent free-thinkers, and that other fools may pat them on the back and tell them how clever they are. And it is easy to sell the last rewarding sentence of the Great Judge and King for the paltry toy, the painted gewgaws of the prince of this world. Men and brethren, take heed to yourselves and your buying and selling! There are men every day selling their souls for a handful of sordid dust, public men selling their principles for a weathercock popularity of a season, commercial men selling a bit of their conscience every day to make an extra five per cent., until they have sold it all and have no conscience left; and there are Christian men selling their place in Christ's Church and in His heaven above for the poor gilded places and positions of this present life.

Watch and pray, lest some of these things come to you. Hold fast your truths and sanctities, bought for you with the blood of Christ and the pangs of

innumerable martyrs. Hold them fast; they are worth more to you than all the gold that ever passed through the mint. You had better sell wife and child and your own bodies into slavery, than sell your faith, your truth, and your plighted vows to Him who bought you with a price.

UNFORGETTING FIDELITY

By THOMAS G. SELBY

UNFORGETTING FIDELITY

"But Zion saith, The Lord hath forsaken me and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me."—ISAIAH xlix. 14-16.

THE faith of the prophets in the compassion and unchanging fidelity of the Covenant God, under adverse conditions, is as striking as that of the most illustrious patriarchs. When the shadows lie deepest upon Israel's destiny, their hope breaks out into its loftiest song. Isaiah's most glowing pictures—pictures that are not the mere dreams of a secular politician, or the foresight of a patriot undiscouraged through a long fight—are painted against the background of a captivity that gives no sign of amelioration. In amazing words, the music of which will never die away in a world of dejection and distress, God protests His fidelity and age-long compassion by way of answer to a querulous people which has all but forgotten the child-like art of faith.

I.

Through the night of the long captivity Israel's sad lament sounds like the soughing of a pitiless wind charged with the voices of shipwreck. "The Lord hath forsaken me and my Lord hath forgotten me."

This lament, like the murmur of unbelieving men everywhere, *takes no account of the causes which have brought darkness over the fortunes of Israel.* It ought to have been a confession of misdoing. The fact that it was Zion who had first forgotten God, and not God who had forgotten Zion, is glossed over. In times of distress and tribulation, if we can accuse, murmur, incriminate another with our puling impeachments, and put the blame anywhere rather than upon our own shoulders, it is such a relief to us. That we should have to bear both misfortune and blame for the errors which provoked it, is insufferable. When the prodigal was just coming to himself, and was in a strait between rage and despair, perhaps he also thought of himself as a martyr, more or less. "How hard to be cast off by those who are of one's own flesh and blood! Years have passed since I ventured forth to live my own life and make my career, and no message has been sent from the old home." What a palliative for the sore, proud, wounded spirit of an offender, to nurse the idea that he has been ill-used and overlooked!

Some emigrant in the wilds of the Far West has been working for years in mining camps, or leading the solitary life of a hunter, or has perhaps thrown in his lot with a tribe of wandering Indians, and he complains that he is neglected by his friends at home. Never for years has he been within the precincts of civilisation or nearer than a hundred miles to a post-office town. Many a letter has been sent back, stamped "Address Unknown"; and dusty bundles are still waiting for him at the trading-station where he was last heard of, giving ample proof of the place he still has in the thought and care of his kinsmen across the seas. Whilst he lingers in those far-off scenes of reckless adventure, and perhaps also of drunken debauch, he can never find signs and tokens of the love which still yearns, waits and sighs over him in his forgotten home. And it was thus with the Church of the Captivity. It did not come by the paths of confession and penitent surrender into living, sensible converse with the age-enduring compassions of the Covenant God. The grief and humiliation which have overwhelmed the Jews, were the appointed and inevitable fruit of their own misdoings, and no sign of change or faithlessness in the Most High. Israel was never likely to find the proof of unforgetting love whilst it continued in a state of estrangement from God.

This shortsighted and petulant reproach, "God hath forgotten me," *made God local, and identified His presence with the symbolism which had disap-*

peared at the destruction of the temple. The Jew lacked an inner faith which might have enabled him, after the daily service of priests and Levites had been swept away, to cling to that unseen grace, teaching and comfort, of which the temple types were signs and pledges. When the visible order of the sanctuary had perished, it was assumed that the indwelling God had passed away. The Church whose ritual had been suppressed must needs be God-forsaken. It is true the prophets had prepared against this danger to the national religion by pointing out that in the sacrificial symbols there was an essential principle not dependent upon the outward form; but the lesson had not sufficiently imprinted itself upon the national mind. The people still belonged to the remote past of the wilderness rather than to the dawning future of the evangel, and when the visible system of worship ceased, faith disappeared with it. The wave of invasion swept the land, engulfed the altars, choked into silence the psalms of the Levites, and then the despairing lament was heard: "My God hath forgotten me."

Naturalists have observed that birds in their migratory flights always follow the old sunken coast-lines. Flocks of various species reach the Lincolnshire coast every Spring by way of Heligoland, and sea-soundings show that along that route there is a submerged bank which once formed a connecting tongue of land between Great Britain

and Northern Europe. The theory in favour is that the migratory habit was formed when the bank rose above the surface of the sea. After the bank had sunk out of sight, inherited habit still kept the birds true to their old line of flight. When the slow geological change took place and no guiding objects were in view, it may be there were timid broods of birds which would not trust these instinctive faiths in the unseen. To their own loss and that of their future offspring they stayed behind. On the other hand, there were birds which trusted the old guiding instincts, and though all the outstanding landmarks of the past had been submerged, they pressed bravely on, confident that after a short pilgrimage through the darkness they would find spring sunshine in which they could uplift their songs, and soft, fragrant woods and hedgerows where they could tend their young.

Now that the altar with its propitiations had disappeared, and the circle of priestly service had passed away, and the temple marbles had been scorched with flame and all the old landmarks of devotion had been engulfed beneath the wave of successive invasions, to not a few timid Jewish souls it seemed that God had cast off His people and forgotten to be gracious. They lacked confidence to follow out that trend of thought into which the service of ritual was designed to direct their minds. The world itself seemed God-forsaken. On the other hand, there were heroic and prophetic souls

who dared to trust the high instinct of faith. They were a seed of the coming Church of the Messiah, who worshipped God by the Spirit, and had no confidence in the flesh. Over desolate and tumultuous seas they could still wing the flight of a strong and an assured faith. Out of the unseen they heard, as did the prophet Isaiah in this memorable text, voices declaring the unchanging and the unforgetting love of the Covenant God, and they found their way into the millennial sunshine.

Let us beware of identifying God too closely with the externals of religious life. If the phraseology of the Creeds needs to be modernised without changing the substance of the truth, if the doctrine of creation is restated so as to free it from some of the accidents which have gathered round our interpretation of the Bible allegories, if the inspiration of the Scriptures has to be redefined to bring it into harmony with the history of the development of language, if Church institutions need to be modernised and made to agree with the spirit of the age, there are always many in our midst ready to cry out, "Ichabod, God hath forsaken us." Now, whilst we prize the creeds, and value the Bible still more highly, whilst we find all the associations of our Church life endeared to us in proportion to the reality of our spiritual experience, yet God is more abiding than the things which are the signs of His presence and the past channels of His grace. Keep the unseen God in the heart when types and symbols seem to

be more or less flickering and evanescent. By linking Him too closely with that which is outward, we may bring ourselves into the desponding mood which settled upon Israel in the days of its captivity.

This lament *shows ignorance of the conditions under which fellowship with God must be maintained.* The priest had been set aside, and was no longer the organ of the Divine will. The methods by which men had hitherto inquired of the Lord were no longer at the service of the people. But His appeals still addressed themselves to the reason and the conscience, and the elect congregation was being trained for higher revelations. But the people mistook the silence of the old voices for unappeasable displeasure, and failed to rise to those new possibilities of purely spiritual fellowship which were now brought within their reach. In the days before the Siberian railway was open, an English traveller returned from Eastern Asia to St Petersburg by sledge and post-horse, and had as his companion an official of the Russian telegraph service. They kept close to the wires, and, through the good offices of this man in the favoured service, were able to converse each night with friends. A gleam of home came to the treeless, desolate, snow-covered steppes. And may it not be thus with God's people in the forlorn and desolate passages of their history? By keeping to the courses of spiritual law and life, access into God's presence is always possible. They may realise that God and the gates of heaven are at hand.

Of course we shall think ourselves desolate and woe-begone if we forget the fine laws which determine our communion with the Most High.

This desponding note, to which God vouchsafed such a gracious and emphatic reply, *shows that captive Israel failed to recognise the divine loving-kindness under the disguise of chastisement.* All the dark and humiliating experiences of the past half-century had been steps in the process of spiritualising an unspiritual people and putting their religion upon sure foundations. They were tempted to scout the idea that there could be any strain of beneficence in these weary, heart-breaking, ignominious years. The holy city had become desolate, and they had been fed with the bread of tears; and yet God was no less gracious than when He fed them with manna from above. The priest had gone, but God Himself had come near in the storm, and there was a sense of new and better mediations in the air. The cloud of symbolic splendour had faded from the temple, but the glory of a new illumination was beginning to glow in the souls of the prophets and of those who gave heed to their message. The daily sacrifice was taken away, but sin was to find a more perfect expiation in His redeeming mercy, and men were to offer before Him the sacrifices of righteousness. The sword which went through the land to slay, separated them from the sins and superstitions of the past; and from this time forward Israel no longer turned aside to idols. The flames which enswathed the walls of the holy city

and the towers of the temple had burnt up much of the stubble and dry-rot in the national character, and was purifying the chosen race from its dross and earthliness. Do not judge God and His purposes by the momentary misfortunes which may humble and distress you, for such rules of interpretation are egregiously superficial. He did not go His way when the sun, which had been shining upon your life, went down. His gracious presence will reveal itself anew. You need the discipline of the shadowed hours. If you cling to the idea that you are already perfect and need no chastisement, you will make ready for paroxysms of deep despair in the after days.

II.

God meets the complaint of His stricken people by a pledge of faithful and unforgetting love: "They may forget, yet will not I forget thee."

The word of the Church about God and God's word concerning Himself are pitched in very different keys. In our doubt and morbid misgiving, it seems as though we scarcely knew even in part.

God commends His love to the faith of the chosen people by a pathetic and assuring comparison. "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" The Scriptures remind us of the Fatherhood of God, a relation in which the right to rule blends with

benignity and sometimes dominates it. But when God wishes to speak to His stricken people with soul-healing tenderness, He puts before them the figure of a mother and her babe. Man is built up of bone, sinew, and strong muscle, and His love shows itself chiefly in practical activities. Woman is formed of rare, quick-responding, electric sensibilities, and she is tempered to act as the magnet of the home, binding its parts together into coherence and stable attachment. Her life, unless blunted by servitude and excess of toil, is rich in emotion and resistless in the affinities it creates. Keen, multiplex fibres of feeling root themselves in her nature and ramify into her relationships. It is to this delicate and sensitive phase of parental love, love with a rare bloom of spring-tide loveliness upon it, that the prophet turns our thought.

But if the love of motherhood is to represent the unforgetting grace and fidelity of the Most High, it must be lifted above common risks of failure, and fenced about with every possible guarantee. The steadfastness of that love is vouched for by a functional bond which joins the nursing mother and the offspring dependent on her care. Nature reinforces this union between a dawning and a fostering life, and stands sponsor for the mother's love. There is a voice within which echoes the cry of need coming from the babe. Security is added to security. God's tenacious and inviolable fidelity to His people, moreover, can only be expressed by the love an Eastern

mother feels for her male child. The preference given to the son may be seen from the shores of the Mediterranean to the Yellow Sea. A Chinese proverb says: "The happiest mother of daughters is she who only has sons." Where infanticide is practised, in nine cases out of ten it is the baby-girl who is dropped into the river, or left to die unattended by the roadside. The statistics of mortality in Eastern lands under British rule show that girls have a knack of dying in much larger numbers than boys. A woman has no status before the law unless she has son, stepson, or nephew, to represent her. To be without a male heir involves grave disabilities, and places the widow in a position little better than that of an outcast. An Oriental mother thinks of a son as the providence who is to watch over her grey hairs and shelter her in the decrepitude of the final scenes. What hopes centre in the infant son who has never proved wayward or pierced with wrong the heart that loves him! In the case of the Hebrew mother, thoughts of the coming Messiah suffused her dreams. If she belonged to a tribe and a line singled out by the word of prophecy, she fell to the idea that her son, if not the Messiah Himself, yet might be one of his famous forefathers—a golden link that should associate her with the power and majesty of David's throne. How she would cling to her boy when the high, sweet dream came floating upon her senses that she was perhaps clasping in her arms the glory of Israel and the Saviour of the world! The love of the

Virgin to the infant Jesus may suggest to us the wealth of tender assurance that lies in this significant comparison. A mother's love must reach its highest earthly climax before it can be sufficiently strong and holy to suggest the great love of God to His people.

And now we are reminded that *this striking comparison, by which God pleads for the faith of His people, halts.* The illustration is inadequate to the great theme. An assurance like this might well content the elect nation in its distress. We should dismiss all fear about the future if we could think that our salvation was committed to a guardianship, sweet and gracious as that with which a normally constituted mother watches over her infant in the first days of its dawning life. The one chance in a thousand may come round, and the parental instinct fail. "They may forget." But no such hazards threaten the sublime certainties of God's redeeming grace. Should motherhood everywhere change its nature, and the tenderness in which it was once so rich turn into rancour and rage, should all the gentle ministries which have created the homes of men perish, God can never forget His people.

Once or twice in a lifetime we do meet with the case in which this deep primal instinct breaks down. The pressure of famine may harden all the finer fibres of a mother's soul. A typical Bible story tells us of the two women in the siege of Samaria who had agreed to slay their infants for food on successive days. But when half the ghastly covenant was ful-

filled, the instinct of the second mother reasserted itself. The thirst for drink often despoils the heart of its affections, and the life of a little child is looked upon as a mere ticket in the lottery of a burial club that must be made to draw a prize. The instinct is sometimes overpowered in the Hetty Sorrels of shame, who have been victimised by profligates and find themselves outcasts upon the face of the earth. A fierce ambition may wither all pity in a mother's heart. Our great dramatist makes Lady Macbeth boast that, rather than go back from the great adventures to which she had sworn herself, she would have plucked the smiling infant from her bosom and dashed its brains out. And in our humane century there are creatures of fashion, less fierce in mould, who delegate to loveless hands the care of their little ones, whilst they spend their days and nights in pomp and frivolity. A sudden sorrow may sometimes petrify all the sensibilities. One of the early chapters of the First Book of Samuel supplies a pathetic illustration. News of the death of Phinehas on the battlefield, and of Eli by the wayside, had just come to Shiloh, and those standing by the widow of the dead priest said: "Fear not; thou hast borne a son." But she did not set her heart unto it, for her thoughts were abroad upon the battlefield and amongst the unburied dead. Under sudden shock the maternal instinct had died down to the very roots. Superstition now and again destroys this finest of human instincts. An Eastern mother puts

her sick child out in the street to die, lest the house should become haunted. Where the doctrine of transmigration is held, a mother may be obsessed to the point of madness by the idea that the soul of a revengeful adversary has crept into her babe at birth, and she is divided between the instinct of tenderness and the terror of finding in the babe she holds to her breast an emissary of disaster. She sees the leer of a demon in its smiles and the spite of a dead foe in its sickness or perversity. Under the influence of this superstition, I have seen a child bound by its own mother's hands, and made ready to be cast into the river. The love of a mother is wonderful; but the exceptions are appalling. It does sometimes falter and break down. But no such mischances can overtake the love of God. "Yet will I not forget thee."

This assuring comparison is followed by a new pledge of God's unforgetting fidelity. The metaphor is changed. The picture of a mother pressing to her heart the helpless babe passes out of view, and we are made to see a sacred hand into the flesh of which an indelible image has been imprinted with needle and biting acid. "I have graven," or "tattooed," "thee upon the palms of My hands." In heathen worship the devotee sometimes inscribes upon his flesh the name of the divinity to whom he has dedicated his life, but here God devotes Himself to His servants and bears this sign or witness of a vow upon His person.

The similitude teaches that the interests of the Church, in days of prosperity and adversity alike

are had in enduring remembrance before God. In His very being there is a permanent pledge of His goodwill. The assurance is in some ways stronger than that which precedes it. The life of the babe, however closely linked to that of the mother, tends to grow into separation with the years, and in due time final independence is reached. But if the Church has been graven on God's hands, fidelity to its welfare is ensured by His indestructible life. This is more than to have one's name written in the Book of Life on high. The Divine hand is more sacred than the Register of which an angel is the custodian. The permanence of tattoo marks formed an important item of evidence in a celebrated trial with which the newspapers were filled some years ago. It was agreed that such marks could never be obliterated, at least without leaving some scar behind. As the old sailor stands, with rolled-up sleeve, by the dockside, you see the picture of crane, ship, anchor, on the wrinkled flesh of his arm. It was imprinted there fifty years ago, and he will carry it to the grave. In visiting the ward of a seaman's refuge, you see the shrunken form of a white-haired man who is getting to the end of his last voyage. His rough, red hands, with their puckered flesh, lie crossed on the white counterpane, and you can decipher the initials of a friend or sweetheart tattooed there when he was a boy, unfaded whilst life itself is passing away. Such devices last till the whole framework crumbles into dust. If the name of an elect Church is graven on

God's hands, the Church shall flourish and prevail so long as the eternal throne stands in heaven. The Immortal must die, the King of Kings, the one true and only Potentate perish, before God's servants can pass out of the memory of His love.

If we are not pressing the figure unduly, *does not this pledge of the inscribed hands suggest the prominent and unforgettable place assigned to the true welfare of the Church before God?* The hands are those parts of the person to which the eye constantly turns. The feet of the king seated on his throne may be shod with sandals, the breast covered with the rich purple, the brow hidden by a crown round which the locks cluster, but the hands are always in view. Herodotus tells the story of a tyrant at Susa who wished to combine with a neighbouring tyrant for the purpose of overthrowing the rule of the conquering Greeks. The intervening territory was occupied by the invading race and its allies, and communication was difficult, if not impossible. One day, however, the tyrant at Susa called a slave into his presence, whose head he ordered to be shaved. Upon the scalp he bade an attendant brand the word "Revolt." The hair was allowed to grow for three months, and at the end of that time the slave was sent through the district occupied by the Greeks, and having reached the distant ally, he gave a verbal message, "Shave my head." Hidden from view was the secret watchward which had been covered up from the notice of the foreign rulers by the new growth

of hair. It would have been discovered if branded on the forearm or the palms. The hands are in constant use, and in ancient times were always open to the view. What is written there is sure to arrest the eye. To the interests of His people God gives a foremost place and an indelible record. The hands are the instruments of action, and the Church is linked with all the providential movements of history. The cunning worker in tapestry or mosaic always has the design just as near to his deft hand as possible. "I have graven thee on the palms of My hands." God's ideals dominate His sovereign activities. The hand that wields the rod of chastisement against a faithless people is nevertheless inscribed with a pledge of devotion to its welfare. The hand that strikes through kings in the days of wrath and breaks them like a potter's vessel is written over with the names of the saints and visibly covenanted to deathless loyalty and love. The Church, however imperfect and sharply disciplined, is indissolubly linked with all God does.

And now the metaphor changes once more. The human analogies under which God presents Himself to His people as an object of faith pass away, and *we see Him as pure and eternal mind filled with visions of a suffering and a ransomed Church.* "Thy walls are continually before Me." Wherever He turns, God sees the remnant who fear Him, sees it with unutterable sympathy in its distress and

desolation, as well as in its reviving blessedness. No Israelite represented in that old-time service of symbol is forgotten. Zion's walls may be broken down and black with flame, and the songs once heard within it may have been silent for half a century. The impious Gentile may be standing where the high priest only ventured in ancient days. And yet Zion and its fortunes is remembered by God as tenderly as by the most passionate patriot. The history of the outside world, yea of the wide universe itself, which seems so large, is subordinated to that of the despised and obscure Church. This is the one dominant and absorbing interest in the counsels of God, and all beside is mere detail and background. The pomps of earthly palaces, and the moving drama of empires, yea, indeed, the galaxies of suns, do not blot out this picture from the Divine thought. The Church with its far-reaching interests has a foremost place in the care of heaven. To suggest to men the strength and fidelity of the love which broods over them, the very angels are suffered to pass out of view, or take the place of lay-figures in the Divine vision. "Thy walls are continually before Me."

These great assurances receive their final expression in the work of Jesus Christ. The high-priest of old went into the holy place with the names of the twelve tribes wrought upon the jewels of his breast-plate. But Jesus enters into the upper sanctuary, not only with our names luminous upon His sacred vestments: the Church of the New

Covenant has been graven upon His blessed hands with nails. The blood of an imperishable sacrifice bears its imperishable witness for the redeemed in the presence of God. Think you the nails could tear that tender flesh and carry no imprint of the Church, redeemed through His most dreadful passion? Look upon the scarred hands and remember how sacred and inviolable is the Covenant assurance: "I have graven thee on the palms of My hands, and thy walls are continually before Me."

Do you belong to the true Zion, and is your spiritual citizenship so attested by guileless lips, clean hands and pure hearts, that you can claim your place as a life-long guest on the hill of the Lord and in His holy tabernacle? Are you clinging in discouragement and baffled hope and evil fortune to God as tenderly and faithfully as God cleaves to you?

WAITING AND STRENGTH

By GEORGE H. MORRISON, M.A.

WAITING AND STRENGTH

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."—ISAIAH xl. 31.

THESE words of the prophet were primarily written to comfort the Israelites in exile. A gloom had settled down upon their spirits; they thought they were forsaken by their God. No longer was He concerned about their welfare; no more was He watching them with love and pity. "My way is hid from the Lord," they said in Babylon, "and my judgment is passed over from my God." It was to strengthen these desponding exiles that the chapter with its promises was given. They were recalled to such a view of God as even in Babylon would make them strong. For He was the Creator of the ends of the earth—and at the ends of the earth they were in exile; and He fainteth not, neither is weary—therefore they need not think He would grow tired of *them;* and there is no searching of His understanding—can they not trust in the light beyond the cloud? And then the message closes full in this, that He who

fainteth not, empowers the faint. Let them not wonder if by the waters of far Babylon even the youths should be weary and should fall. But "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

It is on these words, then, in their spiritual application that I wish to speak for a little while, and I may handle the message of the text as follows: (1) What is meant by waiting upon God? (2) How does waiting upon God renew our strength? (3) How does this renewed strength reveal itself?

I.

First, then, what is meant by waiting upon God?

Now, the first thing we must imprint upon our minds, is that waiting is not an idle and impassive thing. When the Bible speaks of waiting upon God, it means something different from doing nothing. We commonly contrast waiting with working, and there is a sense in which the contrast is a just one; but if it leads us to think that waiting is *not* working, it has done wrong to a great Bible word. Think, for example, of the Cabinet minister whose duty it is to wait upon the king. Is that an idle or a sauntering business? Can it be entered on without a thought? Will it not rather claim the whole attention, and

make the statesman eager and alert? For *him*, at any rate, waiting is not idleness; rather is it the crown of all his toil. I have heard soldiers say that in a battle the hardest thing is not the final rush. In that wild moment a man forgets himself and is caught into a mad tumult of enthusiasm. The hardest thing is to stand quiet and wait, while the hail of the enemy's fire is whistling round—to wait in the darkness and in the face of death, and be forbidden to return the fire. It is that which tries the nerves and tests the heart. It is that which shows the stuff that men are made of. In such an hour a man is not asleep—he is intensely and tremendously alive. And I mention that, to show how the word waiting does not describe a dull or sluggish state, but is compatible with ardent feelings, and with a spirit that is burning at its brightest. Brethren, it is such thoughts as these that we must import into waiting upon God. To wait upon God is not to be inactive. It is not a state of spiritual torpor. It tests a man—shows what is in his heart—calls his whole being into high vitality. Never was life so strenuous as Christ's, and the whole of it was a waiting upon God.

1. Now, let me try to distinguish some of the elements that lie in the thought of waiting upon God; and the first and most conspicuous is *dependence*. As the new-born child waits upon its mother, just because without its mother it would die; as the patient waits the coming of the surgeon, because in him the hope of life is centred; so, when a man is said to wait on

God, it means that he is dependent upon God, and that he has been wakened by the Holy Spirit to realise that he is thus dependent. It is true there is a broad and general sense in which all created beings wait on God. "The eyes of all things living wait on thee," says the Psalmist in one of the choicest of the Psalms. Just as the earth waits upon the sun that she may be vestured in her summer glory; just as the ocean waits upon the moon that she may be drawn to the fulness of her tides; so every bird that sings, and beast that ravens, and every wretch who curses and blasphemes, is moment by moment waiting upon God. That is a scriptural meaning of the word; but that is not the meaning of our text. Here the dependence is felt and realised. The soul delights herself in leaning hard. And just as we consciously depend on God for pardon, for sanctification, yes, for everything—just in that measure do we learn the secret of waiting upon Him.

2. Again, at the heart of waiting is *obedience*. To "wait on" is another term for service. As the eyes of a servant wait upon her mistress, so, says the Scripture, does man wait on God. There is a waiting which is little else than flattery, as many a courtier waits upon his monarch; but God abhors the waiting of the lip, if there is not at the back of it the waiting will. One of the noblest instances of waiting is in the oft-told tale of Casabianca. We have been familiar since our childhood with the story of the boy who "stood upon the burning deck." And it was not

recklessness that kept him there, nor any insensate passion for red martyrdom. He waited because he thought that in waiting he was obedient to his father's word. Brethren, are we not often tempted to narrow down the great words of the Bible? Are there not many for whom waiting upon God means little else than the exercise of prayer? Just as the Roman Catholics have taken the great word *discipline* and narrowed it to the penitential scourge, so Protestants have taken waiting upon God, and robbed it of every meaning except prayer. Now, far be it from me even to suggest that without prayer we can truly wait on God. Whenever we pray, then do we wait on God, and waiting is never so blest as when we pray. But I want you to learn that waiting upon God must never be confined to prayer alone. The root idea of it is not devotion. The root idea of waiting is obedience. We wait on God when we seek to do God's will, when we say "Not my will, but Thine be done." We wait on God when we do a kindly deed, and do it in the name of Jesus Christ. When we give a cup of cold water to the thirsty, when we pay a visit of comfort to the sick, when we teach our little class for Jesus' sake, when we hold out a helping hand to any brother, in all that ministry, however humble, we are most truly waiting upon God. The servant in the kitchen waits on God when for Christ's sake she does her duty faithfully. The mistress in the drawing-room waits on God when for Christ's sake she is a lady to her servants.

The eager man of business waits on God when he prays for strength to abhor that which is evil. The husband in the home waits upon God when he is true and tender to his wife. To wait upon the Lord is to obey. What else doth the Lord thy God require of thee? And when the obedience is all steeped in prayer, then it is waiting upon God indeed.

3. But there is one other element we can distinguish. It is not obedience, it is *love*. For as love is the source of all the finest work, so it is the secret of the finest waiting. Jacob waited for Rachel seven years, and they seemed but a few days for the great love he bare her. He was strong to wait when others would have wearied, and he was strong because he loved her so. What makes the mother wait upon her child, and start from her pillow when she hears it cry? What makes her wait on it with tireless patience, when it frets and tosses in some childish fever? Ah, sirs, I need not tell you what—you know that the secret is a mother's love. Now, as it is with our waiting upon others, so is it with our waiting upon God. Unless we love Him with our heart and soul, our waiting on Him is a shallow thing. And therefore it is that in a Christian's waiting there is a depth and fulness never known before, for love to God is a new thing altogether when once we have looked on the face of Jesus Christ. Who, then, are those who wait on God? They are those whose life is strenuous and full. They are those who consciously depend on God. They are those who make it their

life-work to obey Him. Above all, they are those who have been wakened to feel the wonder of God's love in Christ, and who love Him because He first loved them.

II.

In the second place, I want to consider this: How does this waiting upon God renew our strength?

We speak sometimes of the discipline of waiting; and waiting is often a very blessed thing. There are lessons we learn when we are called to wait, that we never learn when we are called to work. There is probably nothing more harmful to a child than to get everything it asks for without waiting. That is one peril of the children of the rich which is escaped by the children of the poor. For not only is the gift increased in value when one has had to wait for it a season; but the waiting itself has got a moral value, and a part to play in fashioning the character. It is true that hope deferred makes the heart sick, and to wait too long may be the worst of tragedies. To get at last, and find it is too late, is one of the bitterest of all experiences. For waiting makes large demands upon a man, and sometimes one is so spent when it is over, that the thing we craved for, that would have made music once, falls like a stone upon a deadened heart. Brethren, you may be sure of this, there is no such

risk in waiting upon God. To wait on the will of *man* may leave one weary; but a bruised reed *He* will not break. Nay, on the contrary, all that is best in waiting comes to its crown in waiting upon God, for they that wait upon the Lord renew their strength.

1. Well, in the first place, this renewal of strength is rooted in *the personality of God.* It is one mark of a powerful personality, that it kindles everyone within its reach. Great men are educators not by what they teach—they are rather educators by all that they reveal. They strengthen us by calling out our powers, and so in us they reproduce themselves. Set down a Robert the Bruce in captive Scotland, and every Scot in his train becomes a patriot. Place Savonarola in laughter-loving Florence, and you have his likeness in a thousand Florentines. Let General Gordon go down to Gravesend, and work among the destitute street-boys there, and in the hearts of a hundred little Arabs, you find a spark of Gordon's noble courage. That is the mark of a powerful personality. It evokes the qualities which it itself possesses. It flows like a tide into the heart of others. It reproduces its own image there. No need to ask who waits on Robert Bruce; there is something of the Bruce about them all. No need to ask who waits on Savonarola; you can trace the Savonarola in their character. No need to ask among the Gravesend boys which of them is waiting upon Gordon; they

love him and obey him and depend on him—and there is something of Gordon in them all.

Brethren, as it is with man and man, so is it, I take it, between man and God. They that wait upon the Lord renew their strength, just because they live with that wondrous Personality. There are people who cannot enter your sick-chamber but their very coming seems to make you better. It is not anything they *do* that makes you brighter; the secret of it lies in what they *are*. And when strength is renewed by waiting upon God, it is not alone because of what God may do; there is a deeper and more essential cause: it lies not in what God does, but what He is. Are you a sinner? He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great compassion. Are you anxious? He knoweth what is in the darkness, and He is perfectly acquainted with all thy ways. Are you weary? He fainteth not, neither is weary. Are you alone and loveless? He is love. They that wait upon the Lord renew their strength, and they renew it because of what He is.

2. Then, once again, we are renewed by waiting, because *it is only through waiting on God that we come to know Him well.* It is not to those who come to Him for a moment, but to those who quietly and patiently attend Him, that God unlocks the treasures of His counsel, and gives that knowledge which is eternal strength. It is not by a hasty glance at an Old Master that you can discern the

wonder of his painting. The first feeling, indeed, may be one of disappointment when you are face to face with a celebrated picture. It is only as you wait and watch and ponder, and quietly linger with revereing gaze, that you come to feel its fulness and its depth, and waken to the wonder of it all. The dalesmen used to make merry with the poet Wordsworth when they saw him sitting hour by hour on some grey stone. Some of them thought he was an idle rascal, more of them thought he was a little crazed. But Wordsworth was watching nature like a lover—he was wisely passive that he might catch her voice; he waited on nature with a splendid faithfulness, and we are debtors to his waiting till this hour. A fickle man can never be a scholar, just because he has no genius for waiting. He is at this to-day and is at that to-morrow, and remains a shallow smatterer to the end. You must wait on Shakespeare, and you must wait on science, through a thousand earnest and laborious days, if you are ever to wrest from them their message, and learn the lesson they alone can teach.

Now, as it is with nature and with art, so, very truly, is it with the Lord. It is only by waiting that we come to know Him, and it is only when we know Him we are strong. No self-respecting man reveals his deepest to the chance visitor or to the casual comer. He keeps his deepest for those who love his company—for those who are glad to be with him every day. So God has a thousand secrets that He

hides from the men who come but rarely to His presence. It is those who wait on Him He loves to teach; and when we are taught of God, then are we strong. You must wait on the Lord if you would learn His purposes. You must wait on the Lord if you would learn His love. It takes the waiting and the watchful heart to recognise the path of the Divine. And just because there is strength in seeing that—a strength that the world cannot give and cannot take away—so "they that wait upon the Lord renew their strength."

III.

Then lastly, and in a word or two—How does this renewed strength reveal itself?

1. In the first place, *it detaches and uplifts.* "They shall mount up with wings as eagles." Think of the eagle as it soars aloft, spreading its mighty pinions to the morning; it rises 'above the smoke and stir of this dim spot' into the clear air that is beyond; and far below it, in the hush of distance, there spreads the panorama of the world—the lonely mountain where its has its eyrie, and the busy cities that are full of men. And "they shall mount up with wings as eagles"—they shall be in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. And they shall have larger vision at that altitude—they shall see life steadily and see it whole. And so there is the peace of sweet detachment, and of an eye that is not blinded by detail; there is that in the strength of those who wait on God.

2. Then in the next place, this strength will show itself *in every season when there is stress and strain.* That is the import of the second clause: "they shall run and not be weary." Taken alone, to "run" is just to "live," in the vivid imagery of Oriental speech; but in sharp contrast with "walk"—as we find it here—to run is symbolical of stress and strain. Into every human life, sooner or later, there come these times of tension. All unexpectedly, as on the Sea of Galilee, the waters of life may be tossed into a storm. We may be called to make some great decision; we may be crushed with grievous disappointment; our health may take to itself wings and fly away; we may have to stand with an empty heart at a full grave;—and it is then that he who waits on God will show to the world the strength that waiting brings, for though the blast is beating on his face, "he will run and not be weary."

3. And lastly, this strength will show itself *in the dullest duty of the common day.* For they shall *walk* along life's common road—"They shall walk and not faint." Not only in our times of stress and strain, but in our plodding along the weary path, we are mightily helped, and heartened, and encouraged, by the strength that comes from waiting upon God. And do you know why the prophet puts that last? It is because he keeps the hardest till the end. It is because to be strong in dull and dreary duty is about the hardest task a man can face. It is a noble thing to be brave in tragic moments; but perhaps there is

something even nobler than that. It is to be brave, and glad, and strong, and tender, when the sky is grey and when the road is dreary. It is in such seasons—and they form nine-tenths of life—that he who waits on God will show his strength. Plodding along with One who fainteth not, he will sing a little in the dullest mile. For "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."

THE PREACHER'S BLESSING

[*FOR THE NEW YEAR*]

By GEORGE MILLIGAN, D.D.

THE PREACHER'S BLESSING

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee: The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."—NUMBERS vi. 24-26 (R.V.).

FEW words from the Old Testament are more familiar than these. And yet perhaps our very familiarity with them may blind us sometimes to their deep and far-reaching significance, and just because we have heard of them so often, we fail to grasp the full extent of the Divine blessings which are here offered. Even at the risk, then, of doing little more than repeat a few old and obvious truths, I would ask you to look with me for a little at this great benediction, and see what are some of the lessons of comfort and hope it has to teach us all.

The benediction falls, you will notice, into three parts, corresponding to the three verses into which, in our English version, it has been divided. Each, too, of the three parts is symmetrical, consisting of a Divine attitude and its consequent result. Thus in the first verse, the first part, we have the Lord *blessing* His people in the most general sense of the

word, followed by His *keeping* them, or by the sense of security which His blessing ought to impart. In the second, we have the Lord *making His face to shine*, with the consequent assurance of the Divine *grace* and favour resting on those who sun themselves in His light. And in the third, we have the Lord *lifting up His countenance*, as a token of the Divine approval, and so imparting a sense of inward and abiding *peace* in the hearts of all true worshippers. Or, to put it more shortly, to the man on whom this blessing rests, there are imparted the *protection*, the *forgiveness*, and the *peace* of Almighty God. What greater gifts can any one either ask or desire? What promises better fitted to meet his deepest needs in this life, as well as to hold out a triumphant assurance of the life that is to come?

I.

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee": or, the sense of the Divine protection.

That is an assurance that we all require. On all sides we are surrounded with uncertainties, changes—changes in the outward surroundings of our lives, changes in the home and family-circle—changes, it may be, in our religious faith and love. None of us stand to-day exactly where we did twelve months ago; while, as we look forward into the future that is stretching before us, how dark and unknown it all

is. Is it to be wondered at if the old cry is constantly rising from many hearts:—

"Lord, make me to know mine end,
And the measure of my days, what it is;
Let me know how frail I am.
Behold, Thou hast made my days as handbreadths;
And mine age is as nothing before Thee:
Surely every man at his best estate is altogether vanity"?[1]

But then it is, just when we are most conscious of our own utter weakness and the insufficiency of all earthly things, that there comes in this promise of the Divine protection. We are not left alone: we are not called upon to stand alone: but we are "kept." And if you ask what is meant by that, I do not know that any better answer can be given than is contained in the familiar words of another psalm—a psalm which is little more than an inspired commentary upon the words of our text:—

"My help cometh from the Lord,
Which made heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved:
He that keepeth thee will not slumber.
Behold, He that keepeth Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is thy keeper:
The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.
The sun shall not smite thee by day,
Nor the moon by night.
The Lord shall keep thee from all evil;
He shall keep thy soul.
The Lord shall keep thy going out and thy coming in,
From this time forth and for evermore."[2]

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[1] Psalm xxxix. 4, 5.

[2] Psalm cxxi. 2-8.

That is to be "kept": to be conscious that "the eyes of the Lord," who never slumbers nor sleeps, are upon us from the beginning of the year to the end of the year: and that whatever it may have in store for us, be it good or ill, be it joy or sorrow, be it life or death, He, our Divine Helper, will "keep" our going out and our coming in, both now and for ever.

There is a simple child's story which always seems to me to convey a profound and too often forgotten truth. It is the tale of the boy who, with his father, was climbing some steep and dangerous place, and to whom a voice from below suddenly called up: "Have you fast hold of your father?" "No!" was the immediate answer; "but he has fast hold of me." That is the first, the main thing—not the sense of our keeping hold of God—if that were all, how weak, how ready to fall we all should be—but rather the sense that our Heavenly Father has hold of us, and that because He is greater than all, no one is able to pluck us out of His hand (*cf.* John x. 29).

"And so I go on, not knowing.
I would not, if I might.
I would rather walk in the dark with God,
Than walk alone in the light.
I would rather walk with God by faith,
Than walk alone by sight."

It is the LORD, who made heaven and earth, who will bless and keep us.

II.

Great, however, though this promise is, it is followed by another equally great. The Lord who blesses is the Lord also who makes His face to shine upon His people; and who not only keeps them in the way, but is gracious, forgiving towards them, even when they have wandered out of it.

For that this is the root-idea underlying the thought of the grace of God, one or two passages from Holy Scripture will again make abundantly clear. Take, for example, the Lord's own proclamation of Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exod. xxxiv. 6). Or this passage from the prophet Joel: "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil" (ii. 13). Or, once more, these words from the Book of Nehemiah: "Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (ix. 17). All these passages, you will notice, are taken from the Old Testament, that part of the Bible which we sometimes think presents God only in His infinite majesty and power, but which, as truly as the New Testament, is one long record of the infinite patience and unwearied grace of God.

And yet how much more abundantly manifest is that grace to us "upon whom the ends of the ages are come"! (1 Cor. x. 11). Upon us the light hath shined out of darkness; to us God has spoken no longer as to the fathers in the prophets, but in a Son, "the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person." Surely as we think of the *grace* of Him who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, we can no longer have any doubt as to God's loving purposes regarding us. And if, conscious of our own utter sinfulness and need, our prayer still is: "God be merciful to me, a sinner," is it not only to hear Christ's own answer coming back to us: "Son, daughter, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven"?

It is not only as those who *remember* their sins that we stand before God at this solemn season, but as those to whom the *grace* of God has appeared, bringing salvation, and who, as Christ's professing followers, have been set apart "a people for His own possession, zealous of good works." For us, as for all upon whom the Lord has made His face to shine, "the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new" (2 Cor. v. 17).

III.

Upon this sense of forgiveness, there follows the sense of peace. "The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

The figure is derived from the thought of some earthly sovereign seated upon his throne, and who, as his subjects appear before him, lifts upon them a countenance so full of approval and goodwill, that no longer have they any fear, but enjoy the utmost confidence and peace. Even so with those to whom the Lord has shown Himself as their friend. A peace which the world can neither give nor take away fills their hearts—a peace that casts out fear—"the fear of the guilt that we own, of the evil we have done, of the death that we deserve." Outward calamities may disturb, but they cannot really shake it; for it is rooted in the inward relation of the soul to God, in the consciousness that God Himself is with us. And though, so long as we are in this world, we cannot expect wholly to escape *fightings without* and *fears within*, still, is not the universal experience this, that the more completely we learn to lean ourselves on the strong arms of Everlasting Love, the more do we discover that "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," will *keep*, will *guard*, will *garrison* our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus? (Phil. iv. 7).

When Horace Bushnell was dying, he murmured

one day slowly, and in great weakness, to those around his bed: "Well now, we are all going home together: and I say, the Lord be with you, and in grace, and peace, and love—and that is the way I have come along home."

It is the only way for us all—the way we must all tread—if from amidst the temptations and the trials and the sorrows of earth, we hope to find our way home together.

May this New Year be but a fresh stage in this heavenward pilgrimage! May it find us, if God spares us to see the close of it—and that can hardly be the lot of all—ever growing in grace, and in the knowledge and the love of our Heavenly Father! And therefore I say once more, as the best and the highest New Year's wish that one can wish for another:—

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee:
The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:
The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

THE MYSTERY OF PAIN

By T. H. DARLOW, M.A.

THE MYSTERY OF PAIN

"It pleased the Lord to bruise him."—ISAIAH liii. 10.

THERE is no need to look up this text. Few chapters in the Bible have stamped themselves so ineffaceably on the Christian conscience and memory. Hardly any sentences of ancient Scripture have sunk deeper into the Church's heart. Yet their first intention and application are by no means clear. As we read this great prophecy, we are taken up with thoughts of Him who fulfilled it, centuries later, in the fulness of time. But it is difficult to say for certain who was originally meant by "the Servant of the Lord"—difficult to grasp precisely what that phrase stood for in the prophet's mind.

It seems that in these later chapters of Isaiah, God's Servant stands, first of all, for Israel. The whole people is here personified into an individual. Just as St John saw the whole multitude of the redeemed, and idealised them into a unit—"the Bride, the Lamb's wife." You remember how a Russian Tsar once described modern Turkey as "the sick man": in the same sort of way the prophet here pictures Israel as the righteous man—the loyal, long-

suffering Servant of God. But again, this title applies not to all the Jews, but only to the true seed of Abraham, winnowed out from the chaff and dust. God's Servant is peculiarly the elect remnant "faithful among the faithless found," the small transfigured band which sums up and embodies all that the name Israel really means. And once more the prophet's thought passes on from this ideal genius of his people to an actual Person in whom the ideal comes true. The seer looks forward to some one who shall incarnate the whole hope and duty and destiny of the chosen race—who shall be the Prophet of prophets and the Martyr of martyrs. And so this picture of God's unique Servant in the Old Testament shadows forth the lineaments and likeness of God's only-begotten Son in the New.

I.

"It pleased the Lord to bruise him." In this text and throughout this chapter, God's elect Servant appears as a man of sorrows.

Perhaps the hardest problem in the world is the problem of suffering, the great mystery of human pain—why it comes, and what it means, and how it can be borne. Some of you ignore it, while you live jocund in your sunny spring-time: you will scarcely understand what I am speaking about. But as the years darken and grow heavier, and the stress

becomes more stern, every serious man is forced to ponder this deep question, when he learns for himself what it is like to be bruised and put to grief.

Each of us has his private trials and disappointments: every man must bear his own burden through the world. But beyond these common troubles, we have known, if not in our own lives, then among our friends and kinsfolk, calamities which are simply crushing. We have seen a blow fall which leaves a man's whole nature bruised and beaten down, so that it droops like a lily on a broken stem. Such a blow may come from various quarters. It may strike your health: not by an ordinary illness which runs its course, but by some obscure nervous malady which forces you to creep through the rest of your days as a crippled man. Or the blow may strike your property, so that you find your whole fortune suddenly wrecked and ruined. Or again, it may come as a bereavement—one of those cureless, inconsolable losses which create a blank that can never be filled again. Or it may come as disgrace—through some open shame to yourself or your family, so that you feel you can never hold up your head again among men. Yes, and there are those who have to face not a single shock but many blows repeated from different sides. They are wrecked in a stormy sea of troubles, until it seems that all God's waves and billows are gone over them; and in their desolation they cry, like Richard Baxter when his wife died:

"Nor will I consent to be judged by any who has not felt the like." Heart-breaking experiences such as these drive us back upon the ancient, importunate questions, which are as old as the world: How can such things be? What do they mean? What good can they do?

The Bible is full of this endless problem. Through half the Psalter you can hear it uttered again and again by the voice of a stricken, bewildered soul. And our text gives the only answer, the profound and inexplicable answer, which pierces right into the centre and mystery of providence and of redemption too. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him." What a collocation of terms: *pleased* and *bruised.* We cannot explain them; we are simply thrown back upon the unfathomable, unsearchable will of God.

II.

People sometimes tell us that the anguish in the world must needs be. It belongs to the natural order.

All things work together inexorably and inevitably. All effects are produced by their chain of causes. Well, that is cold comfort; and that way of looking at things is utterly unchristian. The Bible never shows us the universe as a vast machine that grinds out its results by the iron law of consequences. The Bible bids us see God in everything—in the tiniest

trifles, as well as in the mightiest revolutions. God's will is controlling the course of nature and the long march of history and all the details of each individual human lot. *His dominion ruleth over all:* "He holds in His hand alike the cheat and the victim. He smites the eloquent with stammering, and turns the sage into a driveller, and causes nations to swerve aside over precipices, under the guidance of leaders whom He Himself has made blind." Often in these days men ask for the theology of the Sermon on the Mount. Well, the chief doctrine which Christ preached in that Sermon was the doctrine of a particular Providence. Without our Father, not a single sparrow falls to the ground, nor a single tear. Christ bids us refer each event in our experience, however strange and dreadful it seems, back to its living Author and Disposer and End.

Yet have we faith to cling to our Lord's teaching in its fulness? During the last few years, thousands of men and women and little children have been crushed to death without a moment's warning by sudden shocks of earthquake. What can we say to such catastrophes? Only this: *it pleased the Lord.* It was God's doing, though it is terrible in our eyes. Take a simple, individual instance. You remember, in Mrs Ewing's beautiful *Story of a Short Life*, the brilliant boy with such splendid promise and prospects, who slipped under a carriage one afternoon and was carried home crippled, only to linger for a year or two in helpless pain. How can we explain

such a tragedy? There is no explanation. By that bedside we can only bow our heads humbly and worship the inscrutable Will. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him": that is the last word which can be said.

III.

Some theologians, again, will try to resolve human suffering into so much punishment. They tell you that your pain is only the due reward and retribution for your sin.

They say, in effect: "It is all your own fault." They cling to the old Hebrew doctrine that goodness must always bring a man prosperity, and they argue, just as Job's comforters argued, that when a man is plunged into some deep trouble, this only proves that he must certainly have done something wicked to deserve it. Well, suffering may indeed be one of God's angels and ministers of justice. And when your own sins have found you out and come home to you in sure and secret ways which no other man dreams of, it is a blessing to know that you are being bruised by Him who is your Judge and your Hope. The one intolerable fate would be to go unpunished—to be passed over, and left to prosper in leanness of soul.

Yet to say that pain means penalty is not enough. It does not answer the facts of the case. Often we suffer, not because we have been bad, but because we have been good. Not our vices, but our very virtues

become targets for the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Think of the greatest sufferers you have ever known. Were they the worst people of your acquaintance? Recall the broken lives and shattered fortunes and ruined homes and stricken hearts, and confess how small a part of such pain falls on those who are peculiarly wicked. Nay, rather—"*they* are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued as other men . . . they have their portion in this life, and leave the rest of their substance unto their babes." It is not the villains who have most to endure; often it seems that the best men are most bruised and put to grief. God's Servant in this chapter, as the prophet saw, was not smitten for His own iniquities. He was holy and harmless and undefiled and separate from sinners: "*yet* it pleased the Lord to bruise Him."

No, you cannot say that such bruising is mere retribution. We have no right to interpret all our sufferings as judgments. Sometimes they may be; but stripes in this life bear scant proportion to crimes.

IV.

There is a far deeper meaning hidden in the mystery of pain, and to learn it we are thrown back simply and helplessly on the naked will of God.

Read the history of martyrdom. Read the cruel tale of persecutions, which have sometimes succeeded

and have stamped out the persecuted. Whenever some down-trodden remnant of the faithful—Hussite or Huguenot, Lollard or Cameronian or Armenian—some scanty band of confessors cry out against their sorrows and their failures, there is only this final answer to silence the protest of the heart: *it pleased the Lord to bruise them.* "God hid His face, but held them by the hand." When the worst has come to the worst for a man, in the soul's extreme anguish, this is what makes endurance possible in that utmost woe—to say to yourself, as the supreme article of faith: "It has pleased the Lord to bruise me." How can I bear it? By this certainty, that it is the Lord Himself, the Lord and no one else. I am not being battered by blind shocks of doom, nor tormented by mere malice of evil-doers. I am being bruised by the hand of a living Person, who desires nothing but blessedness for me in His holy and inscrutable plan. God Himself is dealing with me, and smiting me, and bringing me down into the dust; and God Himself through it all is loving me with a personal, unwavering love—a love which never deserts me however little I deserve it, nor turns away from me even when I doubt and deny it—a love most near, most mighty, most pitiful, which endures beyond the end.

This is the assurance which keeps a man's soul alive when he goes down into the pit. Sometimes great sorrows appear to deaden the very nerve of tenderness in a sufferer; they can embitter and

corrode the spirit. But this supreme article of faith brings strength and patience in the sharpest struggle and the darkest night. I can endure, so long as I know that I am not deserted. A supernatural energy is shed abroad in my poor, bruised, wounded soul. It is the presence of the Holy Ghost who assures me in His secret communion that this awful will of God is nothing but pure and perfect love.

V.

There are two directions along which we may catch a glimpse of light upon God's purpose in the bruising of His holiest and best beloved children.

1. *By the thought of education.*—Pain is not simply a great penalty; it is also a great teacher. How curiously uneducated in grace many Christians seem to be. Their cheap, shallow experience has brought no religious perception, no true spiritual culture. Like Portia, they are unlearned, unschooled, unpractised. But wait until after they have suffered awhile—really suffered—and mark the difference. God's house of correction is His school of instruction. His true saints have all graduated in the university of grief. On the other hand, watch the sleek, prosperous people, who have their portion in this life—how fatally they grow self-contained, self-centred, self-sufficing. Verily, they have their reward. God has reserved some better thing for you and me.

He makes our disappointments and our losses to be the avenues for His approach and the inlets of His entrance into the soul, to the end that we may possess His own peace, which the world can neither give nor take away.

2. But beyond this thought of education, there lies *the further thought of expiation.* I have no space or skill to explain how much this involves. Yet it is true that all human souls are knit together into a spiritual whole, and they suffer for each other. There is a solidarity in sin, and a solidarity in redemption too. In God's moral order, into which we are born, the pain of the one may work for the healing of the many, just as the iniquity of the many works pain for the one. St Paul saw his own unselfish sorrows transfigured and transmuted into a sacred fellowship with the sorrows of the Redeemer. He cried, with a kind of awful joy: "I fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ, for the sake of His Body, the Church."

Yet what a staggering word is that: "God scourgeth *every* son whom He receiveth." No other experience has such power to deliver us from shadows, to bring us to grasp realities. When you have been baptised in that cloud and that sea, you emerge a different creature. In the light which shines across a sickbed or breaks over the edge of an open grave, how the great words of Scripture come home to us as living things. We know then that our true life is *hid*—hid with Christ in God.

The perfect Servant, the perfect Son of God, proved in His infinite passion the meaning and virtue and power of sorrow. It pleased the Lord to bruise Him — even Him. Christ suffered, not by some bad accident, not by a chance explosion of Jewish malice. No, He was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. The Holiest of all must needs become the most bruised and sorrowful of all—not for His own sake, but for ours. "He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. By His stripes we are healed." This is the best beloved Son, in whom God is well pleased.

VI.

The Cross of Jesus Christ tells us that there is an inexplicable necessity for the anguish and death which press upon the whole world, because God Himself has stooped to bear the curse of it all.

That Cross is the everlasting pledge of God's sympathy with man, of God's willingness to endure the deep burden of woe laid upon humanity in His inexplicable ordaining. And therefore the Cross becomes our refuge from the harsh fatalism of nature and the dark inscrutable ordering of life. In the words of a wise Churchman, Jesus Christ revealed God's hidden love, not by arguments, not

by miracles, but in His own Person. He took upon Himself all that tells against the Divine love, and in His bitter passion and death He made it the very occasion for expressing the depth of the Divine self-sacrifice. He justifies the tragedy of existence. And the satisfaction which He gives us lies in this: He proves to us, out of the very heart of all that seems to speak against such a conclusion, that behind this groaning and travailing creation there lies God's love, and beyond it all God's victory.

"It pleased the Lord to bruise *Him*." Under the shadow of that Cross, God's elect sufferers learn faith which becomes at last "a solemn scorn of ills." You pity them and compassionate them with a certain wonder; but they do not pity themselves. They are lifted far above self-commiseration. As you listen, you may hear them murmur softly: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." And they are hearing the heavenly Voice: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the cross before He gives you the kingdom." *Let them therefore that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls unto Him, as to a faithful Creator.*

THE VALLEY OF BACA A PLACE OF SPRINGS

By JOHN C. LAMBERT, D.D.

THE VALLEY OF BACA A PLACE OF SPRINGS

"Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well."—PSALM lxxxiv. 6.

THE psalm from which these words are taken may be called "The Psalm of the Sanctuary." It celebrates the praises of God's house and the blessedness of those who worship there. And yet the man who wrote it did not himself possess the privileges of the Temple worship. He was a fugitive among the mountains, or perhaps an exile in a foreign land.

It often happens that God's house never seems so dear to the heart as when the privilege of entering it has been taken away. The bed-ridden Christian longs for it as he never did in the days of health and strength; he thinks with envious regret of the time when he went with the multitude with the voice of joy and praise, with the multitude that kept holy day, and he sighs, "When shall I come and appear before God?" In Coleridge's great poem, it is the mariner who has suffered shipwreck, and for long

days and nights has drifted all alone on what seems to be a God-forsaken waste of waters, who exclaims:

> "O sweeter than the marriage-feast,
> 'Tis sweeter far to me,
> To walk together to the kirk
> With a goodly company!"

I remember once listening in Norway to a song sung by a Norwegian girl, which, although I did not rightly understand the meaning of the words, seemed to me to strike some of the most sweetly plaintive human notes I had ever heard. I wondered what the theme might be, and learned on inquiry that the piece was called "The Sæter Girl's Song," and that it was meant to give expression to the feelings of the peasant girl whose duties to the cows and goats confine her during the summer months to the lonely outpost of the farm, high up among the mountains. On the Sabbath morning she sees the dwellers in the valley wending their way to the little church, far, far beneath her feet, and her heart is sad as she thinks how friends and neighbours are gathering there in social worship, while she is left here, all alone, amidst the solemn silence of the hills.

This psalmist was in exile when he wrote this beautiful sanctuary-psalm. That was why his soul longed, yea even fainted, for the courts of the Lord, and his heart and his flesh cried out for the living God. How he envied those to whom the sanctuary was not forbidden! How blessed, he thought, with

the quaint fancy of a poet—how blessed are the sparrows and swallows that build their nests and lay their young under the eaves of the Lord's house! How blessed the priests and Levites who dwell day and night within the Temple gates, and are continually praising God! How blessed, too, are the pilgrims who, though they dwell not in Jerusalem, yet go up on pilgrimage from time to time to the City of the Great King! They, "passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well. . . . They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."

The allusion to the valley of Baca is very obscure. Geographers have tried in vain to identify the place. In Hebrew the word "baca" means "weeping," and in the Revised Version the verse is rendered, "Passing through the valley of Weeping they make it a place of springs." It may be that the valley of Baca was a dry and desolate spot on the way to Jerusalem where water had been scarce, but where some band of pilgrims had digged a well and discovered a plentiful supply of water, so that this arid and barren place, this valley of gloom and thirst and tears, was converted into a place of cooling fountains. But we need not linger over the geographical meaning of the valley of Baca; it is with the spiritual meaning that we have to do. We all feel that there is a deeper significance underlying these words of the text. Let us try to discover something of their deeper import. Let us consider how, by the Divine blessing, the

valley of Weeping may be turned into a place of springs.

I.

There are many causes of weeping and many kinds of tears, and we shall think first of the tears of those who suffer.

The world we live in is a place of much suffering, and on this ground alone it may justly be called a vale of tears. Our bodies are subject to pain and accident and disease, our minds to perplexities and doubts, our hearts to many wounds and disappointments. Sometimes the world's suffering bulks so largely in our view that we feel as if we had come into being only to suffer. And it is one of the characteristics of the age we are living in that men have grown highly sensitive to their sufferings. There is a school of thinkers which teaches that consciousness and misery are really equivalent terms. The evil of life, we are told, so far outweighs its good, that it were better not to be at all. And Schopenhauer, the father of these Pessimists, as they call themselves, declared that the life of the animal is more to be envied than that of the man, while the life of the plant is better than that of the animal. Unconsciousness is the blessedness of what exists. But the best of all would be that all existence were annihilated.

Now, without following this school in its one-sided view of life, and consequent exaggeration of suffering, we must admit that suffering is so common and so

universally diffused that it casts a broad, dark shadow over human life as a whole. It is right, therefore, that we should inquire if there are no wells or springs of comfort and relief that men can discover in the midst of all this pain. And no doubt it is true that the world has worked out various philosophies of its own regarding this terrible fact of human suffering. The thing is inevitable, many say, therefore let us bear patiently. It is *kismet*, as the Orientals call it—it is our destiny—and so we must just submit. And others, rising higher, have tried to show that suffering serves a useful purpose in the development of character and the evolution of society. It makes men stronger, nobler, more unselfish; it makes life richer and grander; and therefore we should not merely submit to it passively, but take it up as a sacred burden for the sake of the gain it will bring. These are some of the lessons of life's practical philosophy, good in their way perhaps, and yet barren and cold and uninspiring to suffering hearts. It can hardly be professed that they enable men and women generally

> "To find in loss some gain to match,
> Or stretch through time a hand to catch
> The far-off interest of tears."

Certainly it cannot be said that they serve to turn the valley of Weeping into a place of springs. But in the Christian gospel we do find a message

whereby springs of comfort are opened in the desert for the suffering soul.

1. One spring is found in *the very heart of God.* God's heart is always near us, always open to us, but, alas! we are not always willing to betake ourselves to God. It is suffering that teaches us to seek Him. A great German theologian defined religion as the sense of dependence, and it is in the experience of suffering that this sense of dependence is most commonly realised. When we are strong and happy we grow most independent, we feel as if we could get on very well without God in the world. But pain and trouble fall upon us, and then how weak and helpless and needy we become, and how ready then to rest our weakness upon the Divine strength. And what a deep well of perennial comfort lies in thus resting upon God—His presence, His providence, His love. How near He draws to us in the person of His Son Jesus Christ, who took our nature upon Him and bore our lot and was touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And when we remember that our great High Priest is now as full of Divine power as of human sympathy, can we not draw water with joy out of this well of salvation?

2. And Christianity teaches us to find another spring of refreshment within *our own hearts.* True it is that suffering often withers the heart, and makes it bitter and narrow and selfish. But this is not the effect it has upon one who believes in God and walks

by faith and not by sight. Rather it softens the hard nature, making it more tender and considerate, until inborn selfishness gives place to ready sympathy. For, the more we know of suffering, one has said, the better we can feel what other people's lives are like; and so we grow more gentle towards them and more wishful to help them. And what a spring of personal joy and consolation rises up within the heart when a man has learned through his own experience of sorrow to help and comfort other men. Then he can make his own those glad words of the great Christian apostle: "Blessed be the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

3. There is yet another spring by the wayside for those who pass through the valley of Baca, lying not in the heart of God, nor yet in their own hearts, but in *the hearts of other men.* For it is one of the greatest compensations of a time of suffering that it reveals to us the sympathy of our fellows. It shows us how much real kindness there is in the world, and how much true and unselfish love in the hearts of our friends. To some of us, it has been a positive revelation to be laid down on a bed of sickness, or to pass through the furnace of some great trial. We never knew before that we had so many friends; we never imagined that our friends thought of us so tenderly and lovingly as they do. And how helpful

such sympathy is to an afflicted soul. It cheers him as nothing else except the love of God Himself can cheer him. So, passing through the valley of Baca, he finds it once more to be a place of springs.

II.

But now from the tears of those who suffer, let us pass to think of the tears of those who mourn.

Mourning, of course, is just one form of suffering; but there is something so distinctive about the mourner's tears, that it seems appropriate to mention them apart. For they are caused not merely by those pains and crosses of which life itself is full, but by that great mystery which lies beyond life, and into which death opens the door. How dreadful is the mystery of death, and how universal its reign! "Death has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"; and so

> "The air is full of farewells to the dying,
> And mournings for the dead."

And how little the world's best wisdom can say to comfort the mourners!

In Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*, we read of a young mother who came to Buddha with her only child in her arms. A serpent had bitten the little one, and though the mother still pressed it to her bosom, it was stiff and cold and dead. "Great

master!" she cried, "tell me what will heal my child." Then Buddha looked upon her with eyes full of gracious pity, and said: "Go beg some mustard-seed from a neighbour's house, and with that mustard-seed I will cure your child; but mark that you beg it not from any house where father, mother, child, or slave has died." So forth the woman went and begged from door to door, first in the jungle and then in the town. Everyone was willing to give her mustard-seed, but when she inquired if in that house anyone had ever died, the answer came:

> "O sister! what is this you ask? The dead
> Are very many, and the living few."

So she came back at length to Buddha, the great "Light of Asia," and said:

> "Ah! Sir, I could not find a single house
> Where there was mustard-seed and none had died."

And what was Buddha's reply?

> "'My sister, thou hast found,' the master said,
> 'Searching for what none finds, that bitter balm
> I had to give thee. He thou lovedst slept
> Dead on thy bosom yesterday: to-day
> Thou knowest the whole wide world weeps with thy woe.'"

A "bitter balm," truly, as Buddha called it—a cold, cold comfort for a bereaved mother's heart. How much better, surely, are the words of Jesus: "I am the Resurrection and the Life." "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My

hand." "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God."

III.

We have thought of the tears of those who suffer and the tears of those who mourn. Let us think for a moment of another kind of tears—the tears of those who have sinned.

There is a sorrow that follows sin but brings no blessing with it—the sorrow of compunction and remorse which is accompanied by no act of genuine repentance, the sorrow which St Paul refers to when he speaks of the sorrow of the world that worketh death. But there is another kind of sorrow for sin, a godly sorrow which works repentance unto salvation. And when a man sorrows after this godly sort, God turns his valley of Weeping into a place of springs.

1. What are some of the springs of blessing that a penitent sinner may find in the valley of Baca? *A love for Christ's salvation* is one. It is the consciousness of sin that makes salvation precious. It is when our eyes have been opened to our guilt and need, and we have learned to cry, "What must I do to be saved?" that Jesus Christ appears most glorious. It is to the conscious sinner in the dry and parched land of sin that the invitation sounds most sweet, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."

2. Again, there is *a great hatred of sin.* That is

what St Paul specially refers to when he speaks about the uses of a godly sorrow. "For behold," he says, "this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you; yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea, what fear; yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge!" The penitent sinner hates sin as he never hated it before; his heart is filled with a fiery indignation against it, and with a vehement desire, as it were, to be avenged upon it and to smite it down. And what springs of holy possibility for the spiritual life lie in such an attitude to sin as that!

3. And repentant sinners find yet another spring of purest blessing in *the longing to carry the Christian gospel to their fellow-men.* Let us warn them of the evil, they say, by our own experience; let us draw them to Christ by telling them what great things He has done for our souls. Surely it must have been a perpetual well of joy to penitent Peter that his Lord had called him now to strengthen his brethren, and a lifelong healing fountain to penitent Paul that he, who had been a persecutor and injurious, was now permitted to preach the faith which once he destroyed, and to see that God was being glorified in him.

We have thought of the tears of sufferers and mourners and sinners, and have seen in every case how those who pass through the valley of Weeping may find it to be a place of springs. But do not forget *the*

conditions of doing so. Sometimes men find no blessing whatsoever in their sorrow, but rather a curse whereby the heart is made still harder and more wretched than before. Remember that it is the man who stands in the right relation to God of whom this psalmist is speaking, the man whose strength is in God, in whose heart are God's ways, and who has set his face steadfastly to go up unto Zion. God must be with us and within us, brethren, if we are to find any sweet water-springs in the valley of Baca. It is He who makes our joys doubly joyful, and He also who makes our sorrows work out to the blessing of our souls. For "the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, how blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee!"

GOD'S SUPREME ARGUMENT

By G. CURRIE MARTIN, M.A., B.D.

GOD'S SUPREME ARGUMENT

"I am God, and not man."—HOSEA xi. 9.

THESE words occur in a passage that reaches the height both of poetic imagery and of prophetic inspiration. Even when they are stripped of the dress of their native language and transferred into an alien speech, where there is not possible the delicate association of ideas and the inherent perfection that the original tongue displays, they yet possess a marvellous tenderness, a majestic ring, and a subtle beauty to which surely no one can remain quite insensible. Let us hear the full context:

> "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?
> How shall I surrender thee, Israel?
> How shall I make thee as Admah?
> How shall I treat thee as Zeboim?
> Mine heart is turned within me:
> I am wholly filled with compassion!
> I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger:
> I will not bring back Ephraim to nought.
> For I am God, and not man—
> The Holy One in the midst of thee."

They are full of poetry because they are the outcome of a heart that has been made to feel very

deeply the tragedy and the pathos of life. They come from that spring whence all true poetry issues —the human soul subdued by sorrow, moved by feelings of gladness that go deeper than any that are the outcome of mere transient joy, touched to finer issues by the movement within itself of the Divine Spirit, and ready to pour out continually the fruits of the experience so perfectly inwrought into the texture of life. Hosea, a man of rich capacity and of extremely sensitive nature, grew up in a land that might well be the nurture-ground of poetic gift, that northern part of Israel with its stretches of fair, fertile plains, its distant vistas of snow-capped peaks, its verdure-clad slopes, its rapid, rushing river, forcing its tempestuous course through rugged ravines, its stern cliffs jutting out into the Mediterranean. All these, and many other sights and sounds of his homeland, find their echoes in the pages of the prophet. Nor was the land without its poetic literature, for from it issued also that lovely collection of lyric poetry known to us as the *Song of Songs*. But more important than the influence of outward surroundings was that of inward experience. He was an idealist, this man, and had cherished for himself the deepest longings after a higher and purer life not only for himself, but for his nation. He had looked for a home that might become a centre of joy, brightness, light, and guidance for those about him; but a bitter disappointment awaited him; his home life was wrecked by the evils that surrounded it, and

in the shame of its soiled love he passed out into the desert of discipline; but his great grief turned, under the hand of God, into a fuller blessing than even he had originally hoped to have as his inheritance. His training as a prophet, so much higher a calling than even that of the poet, began in this school of disappointment and disillusionment. As he received back at length the frail, erring, fallen one into his own home, redeeming her from the slavery into which the fruit of her sin had cast her, he gained a glimpse into the mystery of God's love, of God's redemption, of God's dealing with His faithless people. Hosea, it has been well said, "was thus to learn what no prophet had learned before, and what no prophet ever could have learned by a mechanical revelation from without—namely, that the essence of the Divine nature was not justice, but love."

And this is the lesson that is emphasised in the passage before us: God cannot surrender Israel and Ephraim to a horrible fate like that which overtook the cities of the plain. He has spent long years in moulding Ephraim into a people, and He will not now undo His work by setting Himself to destroy her power and to bring her to nought. Man's anger may cause him, in a moment of frenzy, to overthrow and to destroy the definite purpose of years, but not so with God. His destiny for His people will be fulfilled. In their midst He will remain as the Holy One, who is their Saviour and their Refuge. He is God, and not man.

This, then, is the new revelation that Hosea has attained, the new gospel he has to preach. For him, as for all religious teachers, the matter of primary importance is to discover and to declare the character of the God whom they bid men worship. That was always the burden of the greatest religious teachers. It was not so much to teach men that God existed, but *who* the God was who declared Himself. When Paul preached at Athens, he said: "What therefore ye worship in ignorance, this set I forth unto you." And Jesus Christ could base His revelation upon a belief in God, and say to His disciples that because they believed in God, they should believe also in Him, meaning, obviously, that the character of their Master was a reasonable interpretation of the highest possible conception of the Deity, and thus marked Him out as not only the revealer of the Father, but as the Son who alone truly knew Him.

And there is a real sense in which all of our religion springs from our thought of God. Much of the bitterness of scepticism comes from the misconception that it forms of the Divine character. As one has said, in a recent work of fiction, "His God is to me just a constable in the service of the English game laws. If He is such a one, I at least will fling my everlasting *No* at Him while I live." But it is not only among the sceptical and those outside all organised religion that a mistaken idea of God works havoc; but in what is presented by much of the popular

evangelical preaching, on the one hand, as well as in the type of Deity disclosed in a great deal of the vaunted broader theology of another school, we find the idea of God lacking in true perspective and failing to grasp the heart of men.

It was upon this that Hosea insisted so strongly in all his prophesying. Over and over again he returns to it. "My people perish for lack of knowledge." "There is no troth nor leal love nor knowledge of God in the land." "They have not known the Lord." "They knew not that I healed them." "I will betroth thee to me, and thou shalt know the Lord." This knowledge of God becomes then Hosea's gospel, and it is to be acquired, he would say, not by effort and striving, but by the patient and glad acceptance of a revelation. The revelation will not be in a doom that spells destruction, though it may be in a discipline that is fraught with sorrow and with judgment. God in so drawing near to His people comes with the more gracious purpose of cleansing and of help, and with the intention to abide in their midst in the power of salvation. And he deduces from this two main lines of teaching, which constitute not only the great revelation of Hosea, but are a very essential part of the Christian gospel. Let us, then, turn to them for consideration.

I.

First, God's love has place for compassion, but no place for change.

"Human sympathy," it has been said, "is but a rill from the mighty stream of God's tender mercy." This Hosea had learned. Whatever compassion we display to our fellow-mortals, whatever helpful love we extend to them, whatever gracious dealing we manifest toward them, is the outcome of God's presence with us. Heart reveals itself to heart, and God's most potent witness is in the heart of man. We are brought to feel that God's love is not far from anyone of us, that His ways have a likeness to ours, His thoughts a similarity to ours, as we see Him revealed in the teaching of Jesus Christ. In the father welcoming his prodigal son, our hearts go out in answering love, for we see in him the highest possible presentation of the Divine love for erring and sinful men; and even to Hosea, who had not such a clear presentation of the Divine revelation, there did arise a conception grander than any that his countrymen had ever before reached. He learned to see how "through the ages one increasing purpose" ran; and he declared without fear that God's dealing in compassion with His erring people was the natural outcome of His being God at all; that what seemed change to men was only the

highest and grandest of all changelessness; that judgments vary, but love remaineth.

For us this truth has been tremendously emphasised; but do we realise it? Do we see it even as clearly as Hosea saw it? For us it is revealed in what ought to be unmistakable characters in the Cross of Christ; and yet so many fail to read the lesson. Men have travestied that Cross, and called it a sign that God had changed in His relations to men, that His anger had overshadowed His love, and that vindictive wrath had brought about that awful suffering. But so to view it is utterly to misunderstand its meaning, and to misapprehend its purpose.

> "Inscribed upon the Cross we see
> In crimson letters, darkly bright
> Of holy love the mystery,
> For God is love, and God is light."

According to the great thought of the Christian apostle, God's intention, from before the foundation of the world, from before the creation of man, was his salvation, his fellowship with Himself; and only because of sin did love require to make such a terrible manifestation of itself. Because man has fallen so far and was to be raised so high, had the Son of God to stoop so low. But the love that died for him was the love that called him into being. Love changes not, even when it is sinned against most grievously, but love can never manifest its forgiveness till repentance comes to meet it. Longing

as it is to save, the heart that has rebelled must know its need and crave pardon before, even from the Eternal heart, compassion can flow forth in redemption. When men learn the meaning of the fierceness of anger being felt as the tenderness of love, they then come to understand the wonder and depth of the great argument, that God so acts because He is God, and not man. It is this revelation that gives those who receive it perfect confidence in the God who redeems, and it also opens to them the further purposes of His dealing with the world.

In a beautiful touch in one of her books, Miss Thorneycroft Fowler gives us a picture of a little girl suddenly brought face to face with the loveliness of Nature, and, bursting into tears, not at the vision, but at the sudden and poignant recollection of the sister from whom she has been separated, and whose love has filled her heart; and in explanation the writer says: "If the child had not loved the sister first, the beauty of the country would not have had power to touch her. Love is the Open Sesame that lets in beauty, and gives us eyes to see." And there follows upon these words a discussion as to the real meaning and significance of the whole incident, and I may quote with advantage a little more of the conversation.

"You have not given us," says one to an old minister who was present, "your idea of the underlying power which leavens the whole lump of humanity, which one calls Love, another Beauty,

another Individualism, and another Human Nature." "I should call it by none of these names," was the reply, "these are but the branches of a root which goes deeper and is stronger than any one of them, or than all of them put together." "Then what should you say is the name of this power?" the minister is asked, and in reply continues: "I am an old-fashioned man, and I use old-fashioned phrases. I should call it the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." That, indeed, is the secret and the most perfect manifestation of the unchanging Divine love.

II.

The second point of Hosea's gospel may be thus formulated: The Holy God will dwell in the midst of His people and conform them to His holiness.

The prophet sees beyond the moment of glad return, and gives a vision of God's after-dealing with His people. He not only receives back the repentant, but proceeds to alter all the surroundings, that He and they may dwell in fellowship, and enjoy the freedom of holy intercourse. The city is still corrupt. There are in it many things alien to the Lord, and contrary to His will. These must all be removed. Part possession will not suffice. God must have all or nothing. While it is true that His purpose is not to destroy His people, it is also true that everything must be destroyed that makes

against His supremacy, or threatens the perfect oneness of aim and desire that He wishes them all to experience. The prophet points to the realisation of the picture painted in the pages of Isaiah. "It shall come to pass that he that is left in Zion and he that remaineth in Jerusalem shall be called holy, even everyone that is written among the living in Jerusalem: and the Lord will create over the whole habitation of mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for over all the glory shall be spread a canopy, and there shall be a pavilion for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain." The new life of the state is to be an inner life. No longer distrust, no longer a dread of God, no further feeling of disunion; now the people are to rejoice that the Holy One of Israel is in their midst, and they are to become like Him. God is not afar off, but nigh at hand. His presence is to be their stay, Himself their home.

How exquisitely tender and touching, and how true! We know it, some of us, do we not? That God to whom we once dared scarcely lift our eyes has become to us the Friend of friends. Were it not for the sense of His nearness, earth with all its beauty were more barren than the dreariest wilderness, life a dark, impenetrable gloom, with no illuminating ray. We have found freedom in that new life to which He has called us. We are conscious of growing powers,

of enlarging capabilities, of intensifying earnestness, of clearer views of His will, of more quick understanding of His behests, of more successful efforts at obedience. The Holy One is in the midst of our life, and His presence there constitutes our joy and our power. *That*, we realise, is our calling—to be conformed to the image of our Lord; and what He has willed, He will give us power to perform.

This is the second half of Hosea's gospel. Our salvation is endless because the goal consists in the infinite possibilities of likeness to God. A gospel that is of merely human origin could not possibly call us to anything higher than human attainment, but on the lips of Jesus are found the words, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect," and His great apostle can speak of the goal that is set before him as attainment to the very union with his Lord Himself, and the strength for this great future comes from the grace that God alone is able to impart. We have in the text not only an argument, but a promise; not only a statement, but a prophecy. Let us not faint, then, but be up and doing in the strength of Him who assures us that the victory is ours through faith.

Hosea's chapters, we have been told, are "drenched with the dew of God's mercy." That is why they are so well worth while our studying. That is why they seem to have been a favourite book with our Lord Himself. In them He found a forecast of the great message He came to proclaim, and in all probability

also discovered strength there for the life He lived and the death He died. A man with Hosea's vision and Hosea's message stood so near to the spirit of the Saviour of the world that we can realise the oneness of aim and attitude that unites them, and feel that in reading again the words of that old-time prophecy, we have got to the very heart of the Divine revelation. Man is one with God in essence, it is true, but only because God is supremely above man, and has first to call him into the full communion of His fellowship, and to reveal to him the way of life. No gospel will have any power that fails to begin here, that attempts to bridge on the manward side the tremendous distance that separates man and his sin from God and His holiness; but neither will any gospel avail that fails to realise that God Himself is eagerly hungering for the accomplishment of that vital and perfect union which eventuates in perfect Sonship and realised Fatherhood.

Let us, then, not be afraid to enter upon this life to which God has called us. Let us not dream for one moment that the summons is a mockery. He who has set within our hearts the vision is the God who will enable us to realise it; and we shall find, as one has put it, in language of perfect beauty and truth, that "with the freedom of God's service, comes the peace that they have who love His law, and, above all, that blessing of clear-sightedness, of spiritual

discernment, which is only known as a man escapes from the vacillation and dimness of the double-minded into the strength, the joyful gladness of the true-hearted, even the blessing of the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

LIGHT AT EVEN-TIME

By J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

LIGHT AT EVEN-TIME

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord; not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening-time it shall be light."—ZECHARIAH xiv. 6, 7.

ZECHARIAH always thought in figures and wrote in poetry, and he gives us here, in words which have music in them, a picture of a cloudy day followed by a clear, brilliant evening. No doubt he intended it for his own Jewish people. It was a prediction of their return from exile, and of the brief, bright evening of prosperity which would follow their restoration to Jerusalem. But we have no need to read them in that limited sense. The words of a true prophet have many meanings. God speaks through him far more than he himself understands. His words interpret themselves afresh to every age and generation. We should be right in saying that the history of the Christian Church was foreshadowed in this prophecy. For truly the course of the Church from its beginning until now has been just such a day as this; not clear nor dark, bursts of sunshine alternating with thick clouds and gloom, yet slowly

moving on to the music of eternal promise towards a glorious evening-time.

But the words are no less true of each single human life, and especially of the life which walks by faith and follows the leadings of God through paths of uprightness. I prefer to read the text with that application. For it is an admirable picture of the godly life, the serious, thoughtful, praying life, with all its wrestlings and fears, its doubts and certainties, its depressions and elations, and the exceeding great reward to which it is journeying. "In that day . . . the light shall not be clear, nor dark: . . . but it shall come to pass, that at evening-time it shall be light."

I.

The life of every good man is like a cloudy day.

Not a day with a dull, leaden, heavy sky through which the sunshine never appears, but a day in which the light shines fitfully and is often hidden behind passing clouds. One moment the bright, shining heavens are above us; and then gloom, eclipse, darkening vapours, and shadows. We all recognise at once the fitness of that figure. *Our Christian life* is full of these changes and contrasts. Those who walk most with God do not always walk in the light. Clouds are constantly crossing the sky, but between them are spaces of sunshine, and every cloud has a silver lining. The religious soul goes up

and down like a barometer in changeful weather. Sometimes our faith rises on wings into the very blue of heaven, and then it descends weighted with fears and doubts into the creeping mists of the valley. What Bunyan called the land of Beulah lies close beside the valley of humiliation, and the Delectable Mountains are not far from Doubting Castle.

Our journey is made up of these swift transitions. There are moments when we are almost divine, and other moments when the best of us is thoroughly ashamed of himself. We aspire, and we grovel. We hate sin, and still yield to it. We have angel's wings, and cloven feet. We are wonderfully brave, and shamefully timid. We would not sell Christ for all the world, and yet, sometimes, like poor Bunyan, we are ready to sell Him for a pin. These conflicts and contradictions go on always, as if the light and the darkness were struggling in us and each in turn getting the upper hand. It is a day not clear nor dark, and we often inwardly sigh for the cloudless light of the evening-time.

The prophet's picture is no less true of *life's ordinary vicissitudes.* The sunshine is never continuous. Every year, and nearly every day, brings its gladness and gloom, successes which make us proud, and disappointments which teach us humility. "I saw in my dream," says a poet, "two fountains flowing side by side. One was a fountain of joy and the other of tears. And a voice said to me. These two fountains flow together all through

human life. God makes them flow together that from one His children may learn gratitude, and from the other trust."

"A day not clear, nor dark." Not dark, certainly. There is no darkness for the soul that rests in Almighty love. There are shadows under the shelter of His everlasting wings, but no deep gloom. Not dark, assuredly, whilst your life is crowned with loving-kindness and tender mercies, and you have the blessings of friendships, and the kisses of tender affection, and the interest of honest work and broad human sympathies, and grand religious hopes. The day cannot be dark which has all this light and joy and uplifting. And yet there are clouds. For friends pass away; and lips that met in kisses are parted by distrust or death, and sickness and trouble come into happy homes; and children take wrong courses and destroy your hopes. There is always uncertainty. The brightest spells of sunshine are followed by the thickest clouds. We are never elated by a great gain or joy but something comes to sting, to humble, and rebuke. We should think ourselves gods, with no need of prayer, if it were not for this: "Lest we should be exalted above measure, there is always given the thorn in the flesh"—yes, there is always the mixing of up and down, laughter and tears, calm and storm. It is a day not clear, nor dark.

There is just the same crossing of sunshine and shadow in *the path of duty*. There is light enough at

most times to show us what we ought to do—yet even there, with the best intent, we sometimes lose our way in clouds. It is not always easy to determine what is right. God does not fix an unmistakable sign-board at every place where two roads meet. Conscience may lead us wrong even at the moment when we rise from our knees in prayer. There is not always a plain path in business or in the affairs of a church or in dealing with children, and we often take our *own* course when we think we are following God's. Stupid people tell us that we have nothing to do but act up to the Sermon on the Mount, as if that were all clear, straight, and easy, whereas there are fifty things in that sermon which are puzzles to us, fifty things which could not be carried out literally, and we have to interpret them as best we can, with as much honesty and wisdom as God gives us, and that is never too much. And He has infinite forbearance with our stumblings and blunderings, for He knows that the way is not too well lighted, though it is never dark.

"Not clear, nor dark." That is the true description of *everything that we see and do and know in our earthly pilgrimage.* We see all things through a glass darkly. We know in part. God Himself is a great mystery. His Providence perplexes us. His purpose runs on lines which we cannot follow. Clouds and darkness often hide His throne of righteousness and mercy, and the way He takes with us passes comprehension. Yet we know enough to

trust the goodness which is over all things, the love which never changes, and the power which is slowly getting to itself and for itself the victory. A day known to the Lord; not day, nor night; not clear, nor dark. That is the picture, and you can all read your own story in it.

II.

The cloudy day is to be followed by a fine evening —an evening of clear, unclouded light.

Just when you expect the dusky shadows to creep on and the twilight deepen into obscurity, the sun breaks forth and illumines hill and valley with a golden glory. That is why this day is called a day known to the Lord. It is the sort of day which He makes for those who trust Him. Unbelieving men always speak dolefully of the evening. It is for them the time when the feast is over and the lights are put out. Their daylight comes first, and after that the dark, and no promise of another morning. The Bible always speaks of the morning coming at the end. Evening and morning made the first day. Evening and morning make up every day of God. Darkness and semi-darkness first, and after that the light. We watch, says one psalmist, as they that watch for the morning; and another says, we wait until the day break and the shadows disappear. St Paul writes: "The night is far spent: the day is at hand"; and the apostle who had a vision of the celestial city

wrote, "There is no night there." That is how God's promise always runs: In the evening-time there shall be light.

To a certain extent that is true of our mortal life, true of life's later years. The evening-time brings light. Most of us get a little wisdom when the hair gets a touch of white or grey and when the young folk begin to call us old men and women. They have not the advantage over us at all points. We understand a few things which they have not yet guessed. We are wise enough at least to know what fools we have been, and that is a great thing gained. It provokes genuine humbleness and repentance, and is a fine preparation for a future life.

Every man gets a little light in the evening-time. The worst man sees a bit of the truth and the naked reality of things when the end is coming near. He cannot help feeling then that he has lived a fool's life, or perhaps the life of a beast, and that with all his getting and enjoying, he has made a terrible hash, blunder, and waste of the whole business. We all get light enough in the closing days to discover that the things we ran after so madly, the things we fought and toiled for so slavishly, were not worth all the brains and blood and tears we spent for them, and we wish we had given more of our labour and thought to the nobler and truer things. The calm evening light shows us a great many things in their true proportions which were seen and measured wrongly in the false, dazzling, blinding glitter of the

exciting day. And that evening light, too, slowly clears up much that was mysterious and incomprehensible at the time we passed through it. We see that the way which God has taken with us was a far wiser way than we should have chosen for ourselves, and that when it was most overshadowed, the shadows were made by the wings of His love. We discover that some of the most bitter humiliations and disappointments of our life were friendly angels in disguise leading us to happier ends, and perhaps better friendships, and nobler service than we could ever have devised. And we always see that the good hand of the Lord has been upon us, guiding us when we did not feel His guiding, directing when we were not conscious of any guidance, making the crooked things straight and the rough places plain. We see that the mercy of the Lord has saved us from a thousand follies, and pulled us back on the verge of many a perilous pit. We see that His goodness has followed us steadily through all our wayward, wilful course, and that His patience with us and forgiveness have been immeasurable and passing all human thought.

That comes out in the evening-time, and a great many things more. For then we take a truer measure of ourselves. We become a good deal less conceited. We are more ready to kneel low and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." And we understand life better, its meaning, its purpose, its duties, its foolishness, and its wisdom. We understand it

all so much better that we cannot help wishing that we had known all this sooner. It would have made our lives so much richer and so much more serviceable.

Yes, there does come light in the evening-time, even while we still groan, being burdened in this tabernacle. But to the lover of the Lord, the true morning comes when that tabernacle is laid down.

For when the last shadows gather, when our feet touch that cold dividing stream from which the bravest for the moment shrinks, when we stand on the verge of that darkness which to the unbeliever is dark indeed, it may affect us with a momentary shiver, though often there is not even that. Yet for us it will be only that deeper darkness which they say comes just before the dawn. A moment, and then there will be the glory shining on the hills of God, and the light which no more goes down. We shall know all that we have waited and hoped for, all that we have prayed and longed to know. The riddles of life will be solved. The darkest things will open out and show us Divine love at the centre. The mystery of God will have no more hiding in it. We shall see Him as He sees us, and doubt and pain and fear will flee away.

That is the day which God gives to all His faithful ones. A day not clear, nor dark : but in the evening-time there shall be light.

BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS

By CHARLES BROWN

BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS

"And Elijah came near unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word."—1 KINGS xviii. 21.

THERE are few more vividly described scenes in the Old Testament than this, and few more dramatic and thrilling. From the challenge of Elijah to the falling of the fire from heaven, the interest grows and the excitement deepens. It was one of the most memorable national convocations ever held in Israel. Old men were there, and they could not remember such a bitter time in the nation's history. For years no rain had fallen at the appointed seasons, and the land was literally burnt up with the drought. By famine and hunger God had appealed to the conscience of the nation, and the appeal had apparently been in vain. They had not risen up in wrath and repentance to cast the new and false religion out of the land. Fear of the king and queen and priest had deterred them. Fashion ruled them even in their misery. Lack of conviction, mental and spiritual instability, had been their undoing. Since the cruel famine

began, Elijah had been in hiding, and there had been no decisive voice ringing out clearly for Jehovah and His cause. Now he is coming forth from his retirement. It is at his instance that this assembly has been convened; and by his lips, and by the manifestation of His own might, Jehovah is about to make His final appeal to them. They would see such a sight that day as would, for a time, drive all hesitation out of their hearts, and force from each one of them, in the face of Ahab and the masterful priests of Baal, the confession, "The Lord, He is the God."

What a day it was, from sunrise to sunset! And what an impressive figure that rugged, solitary, old prophet appears, faithful among the faithless, firm among the wavering, facing the king, the servile priests, the fawning courtiers, and winning the victory of prayer and faith. How much he risked, how wonderfully God answered his prayer!

Try to hold the familiar scene in your mind. On the side of that great, bold hill that overlooks the Mediterranean Sea, the crowd of representatives standing in front of the disused and crumbling altar, the ranks of false priests; while we think of the first words of Elijah, which make no reference to the famine, but are a bold challenge addressed to the mind and conscience of the nation: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him"; and then the dead silence—silence of indecision and fear: "The people answered him not a word."

I.

Think, first, of the condition of the people.

Physically, it was distressing enough, for all had tasted the bitterness of the far-reaching calamity. But morally and religiously, the condition of the land was equally distressing, and it lay at the root of their physical suffering. The old faith which their fathers had cherished had been practically uprooted; the broken-down altar on Carmel testified to that.

Jeroboam had begun the evil. For political reasons he had set up two golden calves at Dan and Bethel respectively, and so had caused Israel to sin. There seemed no more harm in the golden calves than in some worldly pleasure which a Christian sets up in his life; but they had drawn away the heart of the northern kingdom from its steadfast fealty to Jehovah.

Ahab had advanced on Jeroboam. He had boldly married a heathen princess, and under her influence had introduced and nationalised, with much pomp and circumstance, the worship of Baal. It was an easier and a more fascinating religion. Indeed, its fascination was deadly in some directions. Baal represented might independent of right. Under the ægis of the Zidonian deity a man might take anything that he was strong enough to get, by right means or wrong, as Ahab seized Naboth's vineyard. If only the deity were properly appeased in the

person of his priests, men could indulge their worst propensities and be sure of his protection. It was a religion of moral laxity, or rather of immoral laxity, and it was defiling the land and corrupting the people. Apparently the representatives were shaken. If they *had* been won to the miserable faith, they were wavering now. A national calamity such as this had caused searchings of the heart, and the sight of the old altar of Jehovah had added to the disturbance of their mind.

To which side could they go? Where was reality and safety? Could they compromise, and out of the elements of both religions construct one? And to this temper Elijah appeals. "How long *halt* ye between two *opinions?*" They had only got as far as opinions, and *they* are very shallow-rooted plants, soon springing, soon withering, easily got, easily parted with under pressure, with some people, like their clothes, needing to be changed with change of place, one suit for your business another for your church. The great mischief in many of us is that, concerning the highest and deepest things, we get no further than opinions. Concerning God, sin, retribution, redemption, and the destiny of the human soul, we only get the length of *opinions;* we never get to *convictions.* And opinions veer about with every changing wind of theological doctrine, and every new fashion of thought. And here is a body of people, distracted in their opinion, wobbling between this side and that, really wanting to keep

to both, the pleasures of Baal and the advantages of Jehovah.

There are two people in the land who are tremendously in earnest, viz., Elijah and Jezebel. *They* know what they want, and they are at the opposite poles; and each of them knows perfectly well now, that there is no room in the land for the two religions, that they are mutually destructive. As there is no room in a man's heart for the love of God and love of the world, one must surely conquer.

And here, between these two, is a body of people asking, Which shall we choose? and saying, apparently, What a pity it is that we cannot have both. Perhaps both are partly right; certainly one is very pleasant. What a pity we cannot merge our differences and live in peace; and Elijah says, *you can't.* You must have, and you must *leave*, the one or the other; and the famine and the word of the Lord are pressing you to make your decision. Be one thing or the other, he seems to say. Anything is better than this condition of moral indolence or cowardice that wants to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. And it is. On all great questions a man should seek to have not opinions, but convictions, and they do not come without thought, and they are not carried through without courage.

We have patience with a halting man up to a certain point. If we believe that he is honest and earnest, trying seriously to find his way, at work

with his mind, we can wait with respect; and even if he pronounces against us in the end, we can still respect him. But it is the man on the fence who tries your patience and tires it out. It is Mr Facing-both-ways who earns and deserves your contempt. The man who trifles, who won't take the trouble to find out, who drifts with the current and obeys the pull of the majority, who wants to avoid discomfort and inconvenience, to get all there is from one side and lose nothing on the other, who doesn't really want to arrive at certain convictions because of the certain responsibilities involved, who cannot, on great questions, make up what he is pleased to call his mind;—he is the man that earnest people lose patience with, as I think Elijah had well-nigh lost patience with the people who would neither give up the old faith entirely, nor reject the new.

Now, it is to be feared that this kind of man is far more common than we realise. The man who wants to be on friendly terms with religion and with the world at the same time, who, indeed, wants an amalgam of Christianity and worldliness, a judicious mixture of God and Mammon, a little of both, and not too much of either. People who cry, Can we not have both in moderation, the pleasures of the self-life and those of the godly life? And I believe that there are people who have short spells of both, who run for a while in one direction and then for a while in the other—a spell of prayerlessness, carelessness, and self-pleasing, and then a spell of penitence

and earnest endeavour—whose heart is divided, who are in the Church some of them, but who have never thoroughly broken away from the fascinations of the world or from its dominion, and who do not really and greatly want to, who have never been in serious earnest.

And there are many people who object to such an attempt as Elijah made to draw a sharp and hard line of division between those who serve God and those who serve Him not. They are trying to obliterate the line, and resent any attempt to classify people and to set a difference between them. It sounds uncharitable and harsh to say that there are people who are being saved, and people who are being lost, people who are travelling in opposite directions, people who are Christians and people who are not—that, indeed, all are either against Him or on His part. And yet the man who is true to the New Testament is bound to maintain this sharp line of division. Our Lord declared it, His apostles confirmed it. Search every person's heart here now, and he is either an actual Christian or he is not. He is either *in* Christ by the surrender of his life, or he is out of Christ by withholding and refusing that surrender. And there is really nothing so important in this world as the candid facing of this great question.

Here is the situation illustrated by my text; you cannot continue to occupy a neutral ground, you must have one thing or the other, you must renounce

one thing or the other. Any attempt to live a double life is bound to end in failure. Your life must be ruled either by God or self, either by the world or Christ. It cannot be both. If you will give up nothing, you can have nothing; and the more you give up on the one side, the more you will have on the other. It is known to God on which side you are; it should be known to you, and to those about you. Do not attempt an amphibious, an ambiguous life. Be one thing or the other, out and out, and boldly. Have done with delay and hesitation, and declare boldly for one side or the other.

II.

Observe the principle on which Elijah bases his appeal for decision, the principle on which the decision is to be made, viz., Which is right? One or the other must be; both cannot be; and it is for them to decide which.

There is really no other question for us to settle. It is not an easy question to settle in *all* matters. There are some things that seem to lie on the borderline between right and wrong, and what is right for one man would be wrong for another. But that cannot be said respecting the claims of Christ upon us, any more than it could be said of Jehovah and Baal. Still, Elijah presses the question: "Jehovah is either a reality or He is not. Baal is either a reality or he is a fraud; and it is for you to decide?"

"Ah," says somebody, "that is the difficulty. If I could only have a miracle such as Elijah wrought on Carmel by his prayer, some flashing forth of fire, my uncertainty would be driven away and I would be convinced." It is very doubtful.

It would seem from the after-history that even these men were not permanently convinced. I recall some words of the Master which bear on this matter: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead"; and I doubt the efficacy of miracles to permanently convince. And it is not God's ordinary way. We have to work out our own convictions with fear and trembling. But there is abundance of material.

There is the miracle of the perfect life of our Lord to be carefully considered, and the words which He of the perfect life said about Himself. Even the newest theology declares that you cannot get past Jesus Christ. You have further the standing miracle of the innumerable lives that have been changed and even transfigured by being devoted to Him. And you have, deep down in your own heart, a consciousness that in Him God appeals to you, and that His claims on your love and obedience are based on right and justice.

And on these grounds, even if there were nothing else, a decision should be made. You might be told with perfect truth of the blessedness which comes to all who give themselves fully to Christ, that you

would find in Him peace in trouble, comfort in sorrow, that in the deeper mysteries of life through which we must all pass sooner or later, of suffering and death, the Christian man alone has an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast. I could declare to you to-night my own profound conviction that you cannot afford to go forward to the tragic possibilities of life and death and the hereafter with only a formal and half-hearted attachment to Christ, and that to be apart from Him is to be apart from true gladness and joy, and is ultimately to come to the darkness and bitter shame and sorrow of which our Lord spoke to men. But even if it were otherwise, if the universe were so topsy-turvy that all the miseries and none of the blessings of which I have spoken were to fall here and hereafter on the follower of Christ, the sole question for me to ask would be: "Is it right?" If it be, then I am not morally free to refuse to follow Him.

Every man knows that he is bound by God's eternal law of righteousness to do, not what is convenient or remunerative, but what is right. So Elijah says, "*If* the Lord be God, if He be living, and your fathers believed no lie, follow Him." So I would say to you: If Jesus be the eternal Son of God; if He came forth to reveal God; if at the back of all things there is righteousness and pity, holiness and love; if God's name be Father and not *force;* if we came forth from Him, and were made for Him; if He so loved, as no royal-hearted mother

ever loved her child, as to send forth His Son to save us; if Jesus died for our sins that He might bring us to God; if in Jesus Christ the deepest questions of my life—who made me and why, and what am I ordained to be, and who shall judge me at the end—are answered; if God has really spoken to the world in Jesus Christ, and the record of His life is reliable, and His invitations and commands are addressed to me;—there is nothing to debate about. The only logical outcome, the only way to escape the condemnation of my own conscience, is to obey.

These are the things that await your decision, that demand your serious and immediate thought. They are the vital considerations of life, and I beseech you to face them, to think, and think now, and to think honestly and prayerfully, and then to put what you feel and believe into immediate practice. The times are earnest, and demand earnest and determined men. If the Lord be God, follow Him, and follow Him *now*.

THE SELF-AFFIRMATION OF GOD

By W. L. WALKER

THE SELF-AFFIRMATION OF GOD

"Be still, and know that I am God."—PSALM xlvi. 10.

THIS is a great saying, because in it God affirms Himself in His relation to His people. That which makes the Bible such a unique book is the way in which the reality of God stands forth in it, shedding a glorifying light over all its pages, and shining from them into what would be otherwise the darkness of our life. To realise *God*, to know Him as God and our God, is the strength and substance of all that we mean by *Religion*.

Perhaps these words, in their original reference, are addressed to the enemies of the people of God: "Be still," or "let be"; "cease from troubling or arraying yourselves against My people; for, know that I am their God, and that I am God alone, against whom it is vain for you to strive." As such, it is a great saying, and, along with similar utterances, has proved a refuge and source of peace and strength to the people of God in times of trial and persecution. Such a saying has often been truly as "a river the streams whereof have made glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High";

and, acting on it, men have proved the truth of the assurance: "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early." It is for all time a great text, not only for the Church, but for the people of God individually to put their trust in. Again and again has it been verified in the experience of His people. Paul Gerhardt had proved its truth in his own wonderful experience, so that he could fearlessly ask in his grand hymn of Faith:

> "When He makes bare His arm,
> What shall His power withstand?
> When He His people's cause defends,
> Who, who shall stay His hand?"

And again and again did Luther prove the verity of his triumphant song:

> "A safe stronghold our God is still,
> A trusty shield and weapon."

All experience has testified to the truth of the opening words of the Psalm: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

But just because of this, the words apply with special force to the people of God themselves. "Be still, and know that I am God": that is, "See what I have done, and therefore put your trust in Me alone. Be still; cease from man and from self, and prove in your experience that I am God, who can help and save you." It is remarkable how much we find in the Scriptures about *stillness and quietness and patient waiting on God.*

This does not mean, let me say at once, that, as the Quietists and teachers of "Stillness," who were such a trial to Wesley in his work, enjoined, we are just to sit still and do nothing at all towards securing our salvation. It does not mean that we are to undertake nothing in God's service unless we feel that we are specially moved by God thereto. God is always inviting us to make His salvation ours and to put forth efforts in His service. Apart from this, we should not really be God's people at all. But it means that while we make His salvation ours and do all that we can in His service, we must look to God Himself as the Saviour, and to Him alone—not to man or to ourselves—for the power to do His work and for the success of our efforts. The work is God's, not ours; the power is of Him, not of man. Our text is a great word that we need ever to keep in view. In our religious life and service there is apt to be far too much of self and of man, and far too little of God. We have not enough of stillness and quietness, of looking to and reliance on God Himself. There is too much noise, bustle, excitement, anxiety, not only in our ordinary life in the world, but even in our life in its religious aspects. There is too much of these even in our worship. We seek excitement rather than what will give quietness and stillness of soul. We crave for music that will stir the mere external feelings; for sermons that will rouse and excite the emotions; for hymns that will carry us away for the moment, but which may leave us

no better; even for what will amuse and create a passing laugh, or for "points" and smart or witty sayings that shall make the House of God ring with the applause of man. So that carrying on a church too often becomes similar to a business enterprise, and the minister must be like a salesman who can make himself and his goods popular, fill the house, and make the concern pay. Go-aheadness is what is sought for in him rather than deep spirituality. Sound and stir are craved for rather than depth of devotion and stillness of soul before God.

In all this there is little that is lasting. It becomes just like the habit of taking stimulants: they need to be constantly renewed, and have to be taken in ever-increasing doses. This kind of religion never gets deep enough into the secret chamber of the soul, or within that inner fountain of the heart "from whence are the issues of life." Worst of all, we are, in all this, in danger of getting far away from *God*—of forgetting God—even in our ostensible worship and service of Him. God, indeed, when stock is taken of the going concern, too often "is not in all our thoughts," but only what is of man and outwardly popular and successful.

Our text seems to divide itself into three heads: 1. Be still, and know *that* God is; 2. Be still, and know *what* God is; 3. Be still, and know *what God can do.*

I.

We must be still, if we would realise God's presence in the world and with and in ourselves. Be still, and know that God is.

As the Psalmist says elsewhere, "Commune with thine own heart, and be still." With *your own* heart. Not so much listening to what other men have said or may say, but to the voice that speaks within your own soul, wherever you may think it has come from. It is *your* God whom you need to know; and, if you will but be still and commune with your own heart, you will find that, as St Paul declared to those at Athens who were seeking God without finding Him, "He is not far from each one of us." "Commune with your own heart, and be still." It is thus that you will find God as your own God and Father, the living God of to-day, not David's God, or Isaiah's, or Paul's, but *your* God. Look within, and listen to the highest and holiest that speaks to you. *That* is the present voice of God to *you*. Get away from the noise and bustle of the world, from even the excitements of "public worship." Take our Master Christ's advice: "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and, having shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which is in secret shall recompense thee."

"Then 'twixt thy God and thee
The World shall stand no more,
And hallowed the hour shall be;
Aye, when thou hast shut thy door."

That, Jesus said, is how to meet with God and to find God. There, in the solitude and silence of your soul, a Divine voice will speak, a Divine Presence will reveal Himself. Not in words or in visible appearance; but when you are thus truly alone, you will find that you are not alone, but "alone with God." Like Jacob, when he had crossed the Jabbok and was "left alone," you will find that *another*, perhaps at first a nameless Presence, is with you. Perhaps the sense of that Presence will come to us like that "still small voice" that Elijah heard speak to him when he stood all alone in the mouth of his cave on Horeb, saying: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" "What is your life? What are you doing with that most precious gift? What are you making of it? What is your relation to Me—that higher than yourself who seeks your service? Why hast thou hidden thyself away from thy highest duty?" Perhaps that unseen Presence lays hold of our unseen self and wrestles with us as the great Unknown did with Jacob that night. God makes us feel that He has "a controversy" with us, and urges us to have it settled with Him. Or, it may be soothing words that we shall hear, the offer of rest to the weary and heavy laden; and we may behold the vision of a Father of love who has been long waiting for us and who, now that we have really come to Him, welcomes us home to Himself with the kiss of forgiveness and peace. Or, if we already know that God is, and are seeking to know and to do His will, we shall receive

messages of guidance and gifts of power such as Jesus Himself received when He retired to the lonely mountain-side to pray, or when He left His disciples behind Him that He might be entirely *alone* with God in dark Gethsemane. Or, perhaps, some wondrous and cheering visions may dawn on us, like those that John beheld in his lonely isle of exile, when he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" —visions of Christ in His glory, in His power and majesty, in His holiness and judgments; of the World as the Kingdom of God, of the New Jerusalem coming down from Heaven to the earth.

The essential condition of hearing these soundless voices, and of beholding these spiritual visions, is stillness, quietness, silence of soul before God. Why we go without them is because we neglect so greatly the Oracle that speaks within, and look too much to that which is without merely. "They shall *all* be taught of God," was the promise given through the prophet, which is made real to us in that Holy Spirit that is the portion of all who draw nigh to God as Christ reveals to us the Father and brings us nigh to Him.

Of course, God comes to us also through prophets and preachers, in our "public worship" of Him as well as in our private communings with Him—through every one who speaks a word of truth to us. But again, if we would hear so as to profit, we must listen in stillness of soul. When Samuel brought God's message to Saul, he said: "Stand still awhile, that I

may show you the word of the Lord." We often fail to get the message that God sends us through others, because we will not *stand still* and listen. We hear the words, but because we will not stand still, we do not get the message. Our mind runs away on some keen errand of our own, and we miss the thing that is sent to us by God. We do not know *what* we are thus losing. The message sent to Saul through Samuel that day was that God meant to make him *a king*. And if we would only stand still and listen, God sends a still higher and more gracious message to each one of us through that Christ who comes to make us "kings and priests unto God," the royal sons and daughters, the children and heirs of the Eternal Father. If we were more still in His all-environing presence, we should soon come to have a deep sense of the reality of God, and should hear His word spoken to ourselves. We should know that He is, and that He is *our* God.

II.

We must be still, if we would know what God is.

We can never behold Him in Himself; but we can see something of what He is in His works—in His manifestations—in Nature around us, in the World and its history, in His dealings with His people, highest of all, in Christ, who as an only-begotten Son reveals the Father. "All things are full of God," and

of teaching concerning Him, if we will only be still to look and learn. "Stand still, O Job, and consider the work of God." But we are so keen on other things, rushing on to get and to spend, that we fail even to see, not to speak of considering, the work of God. We handle and appropriate the things of the world that we live in as if they had no relation to God at all—as if there was nothing of *God* in them. The works of God are near us, all around us, we ourselves are of them, the very smallest of them is "great," and "His works," the Psalmist says, "are sought out of all that take pleasure in them." But it needs our being still, if we are to gather from them *what* God is. We certainly behold in Christ the manifestation of His infinite love, but there is much in Nature, and it may be in our own experience of life, which is not easily harmonised with that love. "Clouds and darkness are round about Him," and it sometimes seems as if there were no God near the world. That is for the want of being still and considering things more patiently and deeply. We need to stand still and consider well the works of God; they are to be *sought out* by them that take pleasure in them. If we do so, we shall come to know better what God is and what He is not; we shall understand better the working of His infinite wisdom and goodness and power, which have not time merely for their opportunity, but the eternity that He dwells in, and in the midst of which we for ever are. But we shall find, at the same time, how

true are the words of Zophar to Job: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven: what canst thou do? Deeper than Sheol: what canst thou know?" We shall see how great is our need of *Faith*, based on what we *have* seen. We can know best what God is when we are still, so that we may see what He *does* for His people. This is what is most prominent in our Psalm. Men sometimes tell us to-day that, although there may be a God, He *does* nothing. This is, of course, equivalent to having no God at all. But it is remarkable that in the Bible the reality of the true God is held to be shown *just by what He does* for His people. It was just by this that men were to know that Jehovah of Israel was God indeed. A God who *did* nothing for His people was proved thereby to be no God at all. I pass on therefore to this as our third head—that which I think our text specially suggests.

III.

"Be still, and know that I am God": that is, "See what God will work; be still, and let Him work."

The life of religion in the soul and the highest kind of work in this world, are not of Nature merely, but of Him who works in Nature; not of man, but of God Himself. We are too apt to take these up as if

they were of ourselves, and therefore we experience disappointment and failure. We depend too much on man and on human wisdom and power, too little on the wisdom and power of God.

Now, the Bible is full of lessons that might well teach us the contrary. The whole history of Israel, whose God Jehovah had become, enforces this. It was never the people merely, but God *and* the people, God *in* the people, God *for* the people: "God is in the midst of her: *He* shall help her, and that right early." At the very beginning of their national life, they were taught reliance on God alone, on His Presence with them, and on His power to work for them what was otherwise impossible. It was in this way that it was proved to them, and to the world around them, that He was indeed their God and had taken them for His people. In that great deliverance from Egypt on which the national life was founded, and by which the religious bond that united them to their God was, if not created, yet firmly cemented, they were taught their sole dependence on God, and shown what He could do on their behalf. When they came to the waters of the Red Sea, with the pursuing hosts of Egypt behind them, and the deep waters right in front, while the hills made escape to the south impossible, they seemed to have got into a perfect *cul-de-sac*, and their attempt at escape to be doomed to abject failure. No wonder that their hearts failed them and that they murmured against the man who had

led them forth. But their leader had faith in his God: "Fear not," he said: "*Stand still*, and see the salvation of the Lord." "Stand still; keep yourselves quiet; do not let your hearts fail you, nor be excited to attempt things that are sure to come to nought; remember that it is Jehovah your God who has brought you forth; He cannot fail you; He will not leave His work unfinished." "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord which He will work for you to-day. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

So, at a later period, when the fear of the Assyrians was upon them and many gave counsel to go down to Egypt for help, their strength, Isaiah assured them, was to "sit still." "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength; but ye would not." "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and stay on horses and trust in chariots—but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord."

Later still, when the last doom seemed coming on the nation, those stern words came through Jeremiah with startling force: "Thus saith the Lord: Cursed is the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." But, "blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." It was their running to man, and failing to sit still and trust in their God, that was their great mistake and the cause of their captivity.

And so, at the last, when Christ had come to their salvation, it was their failure to stand still and consider the work of the Lord in the spiritual Deliverer whom He had sent them, whose reception would have proved their temporal deliverance also —it was their refusal to trust in God and to wait for Him, and their determination to employ the arm of flesh, that led to disaster such as hardly ever came on any people, and to the ruin of the nation, never to be repaired till they turn to the Lord who visited them to redeem them.

On the other hand, we see in Christ One who was still, and before His enemies "opened not His mouth," who trusted wholly in His God and Father; and, when all seemed utter defeat, God triumphed gloriously and raised the rejected and crucified One to that throne of the world on which He shall reign till all things have been subjected to Him.

This is the great lesson of our text: "Be still, and know that I am *God*—that *I* am God; not you, nor any man, or other imaginary power you may trust in. Be still, and see what *I* will do. Your cause is not yours merely, deeper far, it is Mine, and you are Mine; only be still and trust Me, and I will show you that I am God by what I work on your behalf." "God is in the midst of her: He will help her, and that right early. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved: He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us: The God of Jacob is our refuge. He maketh wars to cease unto the ends

of the earth; He breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear asunder: He burneth the chariots in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God."

IV.

All these things were written for our instruction, and happened for our example.

The great lesson of our text is that of the whole Bible. It is the same under the Gospel. God is with His Church, with His people, with each one of us in our individual life, and it is God that we have to look to and put our trust in, not man, nor ourselves. It is still true that "in quietness and confidence shall be your strength." "Have faith in God," said Jesus to His disciples. "Put away anxious thoughts; seek first God's Kingdom and Righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you." "My God," said Paul "is able to supply all your need." "In nothing be anxious, but in *everything* by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." God is with us, God is in the midst of us with even a greater nearness and fulness of indwelling than in Israel of old. He was in Israel as a nation: He is with us individually by that Holy Spirit that comes to us through Christ and constitutes each believing

soul a Temple and "dwelling-place of God through the Spirit."

It is in Christ Himself that we have the supreme example of being still before God. Of Him was it written: "He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall His voice be heard in the street." He ever waited on His Heavenly Father; He accepted all His will, however hard it seemed, sure that it was always wise and good, even though it led Him to the Cross; and, as the result, He gained the complete and everlasting victory. So must it be with us in our life and work, if we would truly live to God and effectually serve Him in the world. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." "Be still, and know that *I* am God." Be still, and see what God will work. Be still, and let Him work. Because we do not fully trust God, we attempt to do things in our own human might, the results of which might well teach us our mistake. If nations to-day really believed God to be *God*, how much suffering and bloodshed might the world be saved from. And if we really believed in God and trusted in and waited for Him as the God of our life, how much darkness, misery, and anxiety we might avoid in our individual experience. If we would only recognise the work which we say we undertake for God to be God's indeed, what great things might be done—if we would wait on Him, look on ourselves as but His instruments, and suffer Him to work through us. Not as if we were mere unintelligent machines for

Him to move and use: not as if we had no wills of our own, and no mental, emotional, and active powers consciously to employ and wisely to direct in His service. But to do *all* in constant waiting on God and in dependence on Him, remembering that, deepest of all, it is His Spirit that moves us, that our wills are ours to make them His, and that the wisdom and the power must both be from Him. If the work is to be lastingly good and effectual, it must be God's work, not ours. The work of man merely, however fair it seems, soon comes to an end, or is made manifest in its weakness and insufficiency. Only the work of the Lord, like His word, "endureth for ever."

So, in our life, as well as in our work, we must be still and see what God will do in us and for us. Even in that controversy He has with us, we must suffer Him to heal and save us. As long as Jacob wrestled in his own strength he was worsted; it was only when he "wept and made supplication" that he prevailed. "I am the Lord; there is none else; besides Me there is no Saviour." It is God that comes to us in Christ to save us and make us what He desires us to become and to do in His service in the world. It is to Him alone, therefore, that we must look. Let us be still, and we shall know that He is God.

When we are tempted to do evil, let us be still and wait on God. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation." "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that

you are able [to bear]; but will, with the temptation, also make a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." If it should seem to us that we are tried *more* than we are able to bear, take it all quietly; be still and wait on God for His salvation. "Wait *patiently* for Him." "He is faithful who hath promised." When you have done your best, leave it all in His hands, and He will show you that He is with you, able to "save to the uttermost." When all seems darkest, when even there is "no heart to pray, no sense of God," but only "a lonely incommunicable grief"; when you feel as if God had hidden His face from you, and you are tempted to say, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed away from my God, if indeed there be a God at all"—be still before Him:

> "Be still, sad soul, lift thou no passionate cry,
> But spread the being of thy desert bare
> To the full seeing of the all-searching eye:
> Wait—and through dark misgiving, blank despair,
> God will come down in pity and fill the dry,
> Dead place with light, and life, and vernal air."

To whom *can* we go but unto Him? And if you feel that you cannot even do this, remember that He is already near you, that nothing can happen apart from Him, that "not even a sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father," that He is "the Love that will not let you go," that in your very darkness His hand is drawing you nearer to Himself, seeking you more fully for His own, that

He may the more richly bless you. Be still before Him; cast yourself wholly on Him, resign yourself entirely to Him; wait patiently for Him, willing to suffer, if need be, seeking to say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I wait for Him," and, with a greater than Job, "Not My will but Thine be done"; be still, and you will know that He is God, able to do for you "far above all that we ask or think." And to Him shall be the glory, world without end. Amen.

MAN-MAKING IN THE HIGHEST

By WM. J. TOWNSEND, D.D.

MAN-MAKING IN THE HIGHEST

"I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought his work on the wheels."—JEREMIAH xviii. 3.

THE prophet Jeremiah lived in times of storm and strain. His faith in God was often severely tried, and his patience with men often exhausted. His work was resented and misrepresented by the people for whom he spent his strength, and in bitterness of heart he even reproached his God, and said: "Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived." Pessimism seized upon him, and he seemed only to see that all things around him were making for ill. Under the shadow of a failing faith and a dark prospect, a divine impulse carried him into the valley of Hinnom where he saw a picture which became a providential parable to his mind. The clay-field where the potters pursued their craft lay to the south of Jerusalem, just beyond the valley of Hinnom. There Jeremiah went into the workshop of a potter, where he watched the process of the manufacture.

The workman had two wheels, a lower one worked by the feet, to give motion to the upper one, which

was a flat plate of wood, on which the potter cast the clay and moulded it with his fingers as it rapidly revolved before him. The man had a design in his mind which he sought to realise. But something hindered. The vessel came forth imperfect from the process, on which the man cast the clay again upon the wheel to form another design which arose in his mind, and he finally brought forth a vessel in accordance with his idea. The will of the artist was not baffled. Skill, contrivance, possibly genius, came in to redeem a failure and procure a triumph.

Then the flash of inspiration came to the prophet. To his uncovered ear the Lord spoke and said: "Cannot I do with you as this potter? Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine." Commentators have generally explained this to mean that as the potter could deal with the clay as he liked, could even destroy it if he so willed, in like manner God can destroy a nation or a man as He pleases. Therefore ideas have arisen in men's minds of a destiny—arbitrary, supreme, righteous or unrighteous, against which human nature might contend in vain, and which shut out freedom of will and burden of responsibility. This was far from the meaning of the symbol or the lesson conveyed to the prophet. To him the parable revealed the patient, wise love of the Eternal God which wrought for the reconstruction of human nature in righteousness. So the Lord said: "If the nation concerning which I have spoken turn from their evil, I will

repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." This signifies that God is not arbitrary or purposeless, but wise, gracious, merciful in His processes; that men are treated by Him as having wills which can be influenced and regulated by reasonable and gracious dealing, until the purpose and design of the Maker or Artificer are fully realised.

The parable presented to the mind of Jeremiah was also vividly present to the mind of Paul when pursuing his argument on the *rationale* of the Divine dealings with men, in the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans: "Hath not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" It must be observed that in these words Paul does not speak of physical force as exercised over the clay. He refers to the potter's authority or prerogative to fashion the clay according to his idea. He may mould it for different uses and in various forms. This right or authority has God in dealing with man, but such dealing must be conditioned by the nature and character of God, and also by the nature of man. The human potter may act capriciously, and may misuse the clay for coarse and inappropriate purposes. He has the power to act thus, and often uses it. But God does not act thus. The question of Abraham expresses a truth for all ages: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And has not man his rights? "The righteous God loveth righteousness," and in His dealings with man is not

arbitrary nor capricious, but treats him with justice, wisdom, love, because He has made Him in wisdom and love. Thus God has given to man not only a will, but rights; and infinite power in God is exercised in infinite love and righteousness.

> "Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
> Thou madest man, he knows not why;
> He thinks he was not made to die;
> And Thou has made Him; Thou art just."

In one view of this subject, this seems to limit the power of God in His treatment of His own creatures. True, but it is self-limitation on the part of God, arising out of the creation of man as a free agent. By that great act God modified and limited His power to deal with man arbitrarily. He could do no wrong to man, because He cannot deny Himself. This great distinction must ever be made between man and the clay of the potter. The clay has no moral rights, as it has no will, nor even intelligence. Therefore the potter has the right of absolute reprobation if it should fail in the making. But God has conferred moral rights and capabilities upon man, and therefore must, by the law of His own being, deal with man, however erring, wisely, considerately, and lovingly.

This position does not nullify any save a false view of the sovereignty of God. This will be evident as the text unfolds itself. But it is far more important to make clear the justice, righteousness, and holiness of God, than His sovereignty. Our idea of that must

be regulated by clear conceptions of those essential attributes being held before the mind. To invert the process, and to judge of these by the idea of absolute sovereignty being made paramount, is to invert the true method of reasoning.

The object of the parable, therefore, both as revealed to Jeremiah and Paul, was to show that men, whether a nation as the Jews or humanity at large, may be moulded and used by God as vessels of honour or vessels of dishonour. But why? Because in some the human will has rejected and resisted the Divine will, has been guilty and rebellious, and, therefore, is unfitted for honourable use and service. The Jews insisted that apart from conduct or obedience they were the inalienable favourites of God and instruments of honour. God through the prophet and the Apostle says, No! Therefore, both Jeremiah and Paul affirm that it is the believing and obedient soul that shall be saved, and that the unbelieving and disobedient, marred by sin and transgression, having baulked the will of the Divine Potter, having forfeited the perfect destiny open to it, must be subject to new manipulation and process, must be put again upon the wheel, and if it may not be fashioned into the glory of the first Divine Ideal, then it may still become a vessel destined to honourable and noble uses. If in spite of Divine effort and work the man refuses and perseveres in rebellion, the fruits of perversity and the doom of disobedience are his inheritance.

The following practical truths arise from the parable:—

I.

In Man-Making, God works from a lofty Ideal.

How far the teaching of Plato on universals applies to this subject cannot be argued here; but that there is a measure of truth in his contention that the idea existed in the mind of God before it existed in concrete form, and that each created thing is formed therefrom, may be safely assumed. According to the teaching of the Apostles, and even, though more obscurely, of some of the prophets, the idea and the ideal of man in the Divine mind were real in the Eternal Word, who became incarnate in the Christ. "He is the prototype of man, viewed both in the individual and universal aspect. This seems to be the meaning of the title ascribed to the Son by Paul (Col. i. 15): "The firstborn of all creation." This must mean that in Him, the first form, principle and virtue, the highest essential qualities of created personality, were objectively expressed. He was the pattern for all Divine work, and especially of the supreme effort of creation—man. What this prototype of man must be as the perfection of beauty and holiness, we cannot conceive, but He is spoken of by the Apostles in language of superlative expressiveness: "Who, being in the form of God," was also "equal with God" (Phil. ii. 6). In the Word, form must

be beautiful, ineffably and infinitely. But, however glorious, that is the form to which God intended man to be conformed. It is the form to which He still intends him to be conformed. Therefore the Apostle Paul rises to a height of sublimity beyond our grasp in his great argument of God's will for man. "We know that to them that love God, all things work together for good, even to them who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. viii. 28, 29). What image can be so perfect, what destiny so exalted? Of that Divine image each glorified saint will be a particular form: and conformity to that image in body, soul, and spirit is to be the glory which shall be revealed in us. To reproduce that image in man is the final cause of God's dealings with him in unwearying love and patience.

II.

In realising His purpose in man, God takes him through a disciplinary process.

The potter, "wrought his work upon the wheels." It was a strange work. The revolution of the wheels, quick and whirring, slow and deliberate, but always with purpose, with a definite aim, was pursued with untiring patience to the end, until the exquisite forms familiar to the Oriental and Grecian worlds were perfected. The work of God in accomplishing His

purpose in man is symbolised in the action of the potter, but the Divine work is infinitely more difficult in the process, and unspeakably more glorious in the result. It is not the action of an intelligent artist upon plastic and inert matter, but the work of a God of eternal wisdom upon a living being, a free agent, with a contrary bias in his nature, who can reason and must be reasoned with, who can rebel and must be persuaded into acquiescence, who has an individuality apart from and differing from every other individuality in the universe, and who therefore calls for both separate and different treatment from every other similar person. Who but an Artificer of unlimited wisdom, patience, and love, could produce immortal, spiritual perfection from such material? But God does so, and with success. The human clay complains, rebels, sometimes with the result that the primary manipulation of the Divine worker is marred. But with untiring long-suffering the process goes on, the discipline is pursued, until the material is chastened, becomes responsive to the Divine will, submissive to the disciplinary process, and is finally pronounced by the Infinite Worker, before the presence of the companies of heaven, to be not only blameless but faultless.

Necessarily the discipline is painful, wearying, and monotonous. The temptation to complain and murmur recurs continually. But every stage of the treatment is absolutely needful if perfection is to be realised. The great prototype was "made perfect

through suffering." His discipline was thorough, touching every avenue of sense or reason, trying every faculty and capacity of body, soul, and spirit, involving physical agony, soul-darkness, spiritual strain. But through the multiform trial and experience, every grace and perfection that could adorn either a human or Divine nature was evolved, until a full, harmonious character was completely developed, and became the pattern of a new humanity. So it is to be with every saint and believer, so it is to be with every man, save where the work is utterly marred by determined impenitence. If in some the process is unusually trying, even to agony and experience of Gethsemane, the result will justify the process, and the form evolved will be like that of the Son of God.

It is the careful manipulation of the clay by the fingers of the potter that produces the most perfect and valued examples of his art. This is finely set forth by Jesus, the Son of Sirach: "So is the potter sitting at his work, and turning the wheel about with his feet, who is always anxiously set at his work, and all his handiwork is by number; he will fashion the clay with his arm, and will bend his strength in front of his feet, he will apply his heart to finish the glazing, and he will be wakeful to clean the furnace" (Ecclus. xxxviii. 29, 30). So watchful, careful, untiring is the Divine potter in carrying out His work. Who can describe the brooding, watchful, anxious effort of the Holy Spirit in working out the full

salvation of the believer. "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." This expresses infinite anxiety and untiring patience as He educates, guides, moulds, stamps, seals, gives minute finishing touches to the believer, so that finally, "God counts him worthy of his calling, and fulfils every desire of goodness and every work of faith with power; and the name of the Lord Jesus is glorified in him" (2 Thess. i. 11).

The potter remaking the marred vessel is a vivid representation of the forbearance and long-suffering of the Divine operator on human nature. Jacob marred the Divine work, but the Potter remade him, and translated him from the plotting deceiver, to the time-worn saint who sang a death pæan of glorious prophecy. Peter marred the clay the Christ-worker was forming for a high purpose, but the Christ tried again, and the clay answered to His touch, and Peter more than fulfilled the original draft of his career as drawn by the Master. From all this the erring and rebellious may learn that that high and noble destiny is yet open to them through the forbearance and mercy of God.

III.

Man's attitude towards the Potter must be one of entire self-surrender.

We often hear of persons who are described as

"self-made men." It is an entire misnomer. A man does not make himself. The phrase is usually applied to men who have become rich or eminent by their own persevering efforts. A man may make a fortune, or acquire fame, or secure front rank in life, but that is far different from making himself. He may remain, in spite of great achievements in these directions, an ignorant, besotted personality, and a total failure in life. Man-making is the work of God. He alone can set the standard and realise the idea. Therefore man's sole action in this result is to yield himself unto God. He must let God work. The command is still imperative: "Stand still, and see the salvation of God." He must not resist, nor delay, nor parley; he must obey the behest, trust the Master's word and will—and the manufacture proceeds. He is shaped, moulded, beautified, according to pattern. A new life is breathed into him, a fresh beauty develops from the life inspired, new graces and virtues become actively manifest, "he is changed from glory to glory as from the Lord the Spirit," until the crowning prayer of the Christ concerning the new humanity is answered: "Father, that which Thou hast given Me, I will that where I am, they may be also; that they may behold My glory." Be the following lines the prayer of every reader:—

"Thou, Thou art the Potter, and we are the clay;
And morning and evening, and day after day,
Thou turnest the wheel and our substance is wrought
Into form of Thy will, into shape of Thy thought.

"Thou, Thou art the Potter, the wheel turns around;
Thine eyes do not leave it, our atoms were ground
Fine, fine in Thy mills. Oh, the pain and the cost!
Thou knowest their number, not one shall be lost.

"How plastic are we as we live in Thy hands;
Who, who, as the Potter, the clay understands?
Thy ways are a wonder, but oft, as a spark,
Some hint of Thy meaning shines out in the dark.

"What portion is this for the sensitive clay!
To be beaten and moulded from day unto day;
To answer not, question not, just to be still,
And know Thou art shaping us unto Thy will.

"This, this may we plead with Thee, Workman Divine,
Press deep in our substance some symbol of Thine,
Thy name, or Thy image, and let it be shown
That Thou wilt acknowledge the work as Thy own."

SHAME AND IMPERFECTION

By THOMAS G. SELBY

SHAME AND IMPERFECTION

"Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments."—PSALM cxix. 6.

THE emotion of shame is prompted by the thought that others are watching our conduct, and passing upon us a judgment into which more or less of reproach and disfavour enters. It reflects in a cumulative degree, and often anticipates, the blame of those whose eyes are turned upon us. It is excited by any rude shock that comes to our self-complacency through failure and defeat in the enterprises we undertake, and by the bitter sense we have of our own folly and misdoing.

The writer of the Book of Genesis suggests that the sense of shame began to kindle itself in the human breast with the fall of our first parents into sin; and the association between this emotion and moral degeneracy is recognised by most of the inspired writers. We speak of the blush of innocence, but it is innocence in a partial and accommodated sense. Perfect innocence is as free from shame at one end of the moral scale as hardened and hopeless guilt is beyond all susceptibility to the emotion at the other.

The dense glooms of the trees, interwoven fig-leaves, the primeval struggle to be clothed, such were the subterfuges in which the newly awakened sense of shame tried to forget itself, and tried in vain. When God gave coats of skin to the abashed transgressors He dealt with the sense of shame, and by the symbolic act foreshadowed an authoritative deliverance from the disobedience which had caused it. He recognised also the place of shame in that system of moral forces through which the race must be purified from the Fall. It was henceforth to be a subtle index for man in his degeneracy, by which he should be able to read the measure of his approach towards right, or the measure of his backsliding from it.

The astronomer can tell whether we are approaching or receding from any of the fixed stars by the use of the spectroscope. When our planet is in retreat, the violet end of the spectrum changes to red. And when a human soul is getting away from the spring of light and holiness in God, is it not thus? Unless a man has passed into the outer and hopeless darkness, the red blush of shame registers the backward movement of the spirit. When we come so near to God that we walk in the light even as He is in the light, the sense of shame will disappear.

I.

The tendency to offer a partial fulfilment of the commandment for the whole is a symptom of the Fall, and ought to cover us with the confusion of face which overtook the first transgressors.

We belong to a race of degenerates, and are no better than our fathers. Not only do we inherit the disabilities and privations inseparable from the primeval sin, but we re-enact it in our personal life. Our faltering obedience and our diverted loyalty would be no shame to us if we were simply in the pathway of a moral ascent from an irresponsible condition of development, and no history of retrogression whatever lay far back in the past. It is no discredit to a workhouse lad if he cannot understand a sentence from a Latin Classic; but it is disgraceful to a man who has passed through a University and has brought himself down to the coarse language of a doss-house. The capacity for a perfect conformity to the Divine standards belonged to us by our origin, and the glory of which we have come short is that which was put within us when we were made in God's likeness and filled with the breath of a heavenly life. The dishonourable reversion to the lower life out of which we were raised, which shows itself in an obedience with reservations and lacking wholeness, can only be wiped

out by perfect and uncompromising heedfulness of the Divine commandments. Shame came with the first downward step into lawlessness as the primitive transgressors stood on the threshold of fair scenes which were just dissolving into darkness; and deliverance from the last sting of this disquieting emotion must come with that final step in the process of redemption, which leads back to complete and unblemished obedience.

II.

When our obedience is partial only, we debase the high natures we have received, and bring into disesteem the high prerogatives with which we have been invested.

A being made a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honour, ought to keep God's law in its undivided fulness. We forfeit the self-respect which beseems us when we come short of this completeness. If the prince of a great European house were to throw off the last shred of civilisation and become one with a tribe of low-grade savages, we should make him feel our contempt; and when discovered, he would probably be abashed for the moment, and squirm with some twinge of remorse. Had he been shipwrecked and in squalid surroundings still kept up the traditions of a better life, we should respect him. We have nothing but loathing for the man who lets himself down to uncouth and barbarian

levels. To obey the half of God's commandments and be proud of the poor performance, is a mark of wilful and woebegone degeneracy. The seamless robe is the only vestment which befits God's sons. When we are content with anything short of a full-circled, symmetrical integrity, we forget the greatness of that heaven-begotten race to which we belong. If our first estate had been that of serfs rather than sons, we might have been satisfied with our poor, slow, limping movements in the path of God's commandments. The dress of which a commoner might be proud, would make the scion of one of our reigning houses feel ashamed. The priest whose dignity was such that he could enter into the holy place, would scarcely venture there with a rent or an unwashed robe. We ought to blush when we, who are of the royal priesthood, offer before God a mutilated service, a life of spasmodic and qualified consecration, a daily demeanour void of grace and ethical perfection.

III.

We cannot escape the shame kindled at the remembrance of our imperfect conformity to the Divine law by treating the Fall, of which we are the subjects, as though it were pure misfortune.

Personal guilt and blame attach to us. God's claim revives with our reviving sense of His presence, and is not put out of view by the plea that we belong

to a race that has gone back from its first ideals. There is a birth-sin attaching to us which puts us into the position of the Oriental, whose laws bind upon his shoulders the undischarged debts of his forefathers; but on the other hand, we have a Covenant birthright, through entrance upon which we possess ourselves of an estate out of which all liabilities can be discharged. Under such conditions, the failure to heed and honour God's precepts is not only a calamity, but an offence which covers us with reproach. If power is given back to us to keep the commandments in their integrity, God is still entitled to the faultless and unreserved devotion and service of those whom He has made and enriched with favour; and to compound with duty, and play fast and loose with God's rights over us, ought surely to be felt as a shock to our self-respect. We still have holy visions; and to conceive great things and fail to attain, is a humiliation under which we deserve to smart. God's claims over us are unqualified and beyond all challenge, and to dispute them at any point is worse than an infringement of the collective rights of our neighbours. A man who is the victim of fraud and mischance may compound with creditors without loss of self-respect; but if he has frittered away great resources at Monte Carlo, from which he might have paid every man in full, or have kept his assets out of sight, it is a scandal he must be made to feel. There is an innate sense of ethical dignity belonging to us we ought to cherish, but we outrage it when we deal

with God's law upon a basis analogous to the business man's five or ten shillings in the pound. We escape just shame only when we cease to evade any part of our moral obligations.

IV.

We are not free to leave the sense of self-reproach behind us till we attain complete integrity of spirit and life before God.

He who shirks the unabated sum of his obligations in the world of commerce, or when he is well able to meet them in full, makes a so-called "arrangement," is a marked man for a generation, and his children are made to blush years afterwards because of the tarnished name he has left them for their unwelcome inheritance. If God has indeed so reinforced our natures by His Covenant grace that the privations and disabilities of the Fall are sufficiently counterbalanced, to write down God's claim and offer a partial settlement ought to make us hang our heads. We single out with such loud self-eulogies the little bits of virtue that we do put into practice that we might really be proud of our half-conformity to the demands of a holy law. Of course, we should be ashamed of ourselves if we defied every clause of the Decalogue; but if not, perhaps, self-complacent, we at least keep down the sense of shame and self-reproach that

ought to haunt us when we observe the larger part of His statutes and ignore the rest. Do not let us be proud because of the little streaks, and veins, and patches of virtue which appear in our lives. We ought to be abashed unless we take God's law in its fulness and set ourselves to keep it diligently.

V.

Let us beware of putting the part in place of the whole, for even the Psalmist in his far-off day felt that such a course must needs bring with it reproach.

It is said that some savage tribes, who have lost the primeval sense of shame and find it awakening within them again as they come into contact with Europeans, act in grotesque and absurd ways. They copy the white man by wearing an old cap with gold-lace band, and very little besides; or a frock-coat over greasy and yellow-ochred bodies, or top boots and a pair of spectacles. They put the part, and often an adventitious part, for the whole, and scarcely realise how inadequate the method is. But such behaviour has its parallel in the world of ethics. There are men who adopt a code of commercial morality, or excellent rules for domestic life, or a civic standard of virtue, or an ecclesiastical programme, a Mosaic rather than a Christian law, and assume they have gone far in satisfying the claim

of the Most High. We all know the fragmentary saints, the people of piecemeal virtue, the persons who practise the odds and ends of religious obedience, those who combine honeyed charities and smiling duplicity. Perhaps they are clothed with zeal as a cloak, and beneath it all there is a black diabolism of temper. Oh, how insanely proud they are of these detached and incoherent moralities! They have put the part for the whole, and have tried to make terms with the sense of moral shame.

VI.

The moral obedience that lacks completeness always implies timidity, evasiveness, inward defeat, and wherever these vices of temper thrive, the mind with right instincts must be smitten with more or less of shame.

Ignoble elements always vitiate the service which stops short of wholeness. The writer of the Book of Samuel, in describing the return of the people to Jerusalem, after the overthrow of Absalom, says: "They came into the city as those that, being ashamed, steal away when they flee in battle." The graphic words might well be applied to the men who are loyal to some of God's commandments but not quite to all. They can scarcely help suspecting that in many things they are not right with God, and have pierced Him with needless grief. Whilst

our loyalty to God's will has weak places and qualifications, it is not seemly that we should put on an air of gay-heartedness. It is fitting we feel shame, for not only has the better part of our nature succumbed to the mean, but what is worse than defeat, we have shirked a struggle which would have issued in honour. Some defeats carry with them no humiliation. A victorious general stretching out his hand to his opponent, who had been compelled to surrender, said: "You made a gallant fight, sir." Tremendous odds had been against him, and he held out to the last. It is never so with a moral defeat, for the soldier of righteousness has a great vantage-ground, and unknown forces are on his side. Moral victory has been made ready for us, and many an untouched spring of strength is within our reach. The godly and obedient character is not fashioned out of elements rare as radium, and its attainment ought not to be phenomenal. The power that enables us to keep half the commandments can enable us, in spite of our personal infirmities and besetments, to keep the whole. With such helps at hand as God has made ready for us, it is not so much our glory when we keep the chief commandments as our shame when we fall short in the very least. The Falstaff type of warrior sometimes appears in the sphere of religion. When the old braggart, at the battle of Shrewsbury, was engaged by the fiery Douglas, he dropped to the earth and shammed dead. Perhaps

that is the origin of the current catch-word "to take it lying down." Every man of imperfect righteousness, who has the grace of the Covenant within reach, belongs to a type which is scarcely entitled to honour either from himself or others. He could not be defeated if he put on the Divine panoply. He would prove the victor if he had the heart to face the call of duty. The service that lacks wholeness implies pusillanimous inaction, and should make us burn with shame. We have no right to rid ourselves of the sense of humiliation till our obedience to the Divine commandment is unreserved.

VII.

Imperfect obedience implies the breach of a Covenant obligation, and ought to produce within us a sense of poignant self-abasement.

A rule of righteousness with no exceptions is binding upon the elect people, to whatever dispensation they belong, by a double sanction, by that of a just and reasonable enactment, and by direct personal vow and pledge. The sincere and devout Jew could not forget that the blood-sprinkling of the Mosaic ritual had sworn him to the book of the law, just as openly as it had engaged Jehovah to the defence and salvation of His worshippers. Every departure from the standard of a perfect obedience carried with it, therefore, the reproach of faithlessness and perfidy.

In a collection of short stories placed at the end of Sir Walter Scott's works, a touching incident is recorded about a young soldier who, under circumstances for which he was scarcely responsible, failed in honour, and soon after died of a heart broken by shame. He was away from his regiment on furlough, and had gone to visit his mother's cottage in a Highland glen. It happened that his birthday fell on the day following that upon which his leave ran out, and his mother was most anxious that he should overstay his furlough and keep the date by merry-making with his friends at home. He knew how impossible it was to get extended leave, and foresaw that if he overstayed the time fixed for his return, he would be brought up as a deserter and covered with disgrace. His mother turned a deaf ear to all his pleas, and at night drugged his food so that he would sleep on and overstay the day fixed for his return. When he awoke at a late hour in the morning, and found out that he could not get back in time, he was filled with wretched forebodings. The birthday festivities passed without the least strain of gladness in them. A dark cloud overhung the cottage and the guests who had been invited. The morning after his unhappy birthday two soldiers marched down the glen to hunt up the supposed deserter. Betrayed by the mistaken fondness of his mother he never lifted his head again. It was nothing to him that he had obeyed the roll-call a hundred times before, now that he had

been found wanting at last. His oath had been dishonoured, his position compromised, his name tarnished, and in a few weeks he withered away like an unwatered plant, and died of a broken heart. The servants of God are bound by oath and covenant. Citizens of a nobler commonwealth, allies of a better kingdom, enrolled in the sacramental host, is not a more complete loyalty binding upon them than that which is due to the most sacred earthly crown? Offending in one thing, it will count for little that we have obeyed many other calls of duty. Whilst we yet lack the marks of a complete obedience, rather than fall into smug, complacent egoisms, we had better pine away in self-reproach and break our hearts for very shame. Let us see to it that we are not seduced into forgetfulness of all that which is implied in our calling. The blandishments of the world, the narcotics of relaxing pleasures, the fond persuasions of those who have an inadequate sense of religious obligation, must not tempt us to make light of the bond into which we have entered. If our covenant vows are dishonoured, shame, sharp as the arrows of death, will one day smite us.

VIII.

Imperfect obedience brings with it a more or less bitter accompaniment of shame, because it limits the success of our plans and causes many a humiliation in the outward life.

Whilst our surrender to God's demands lacks whole-heartedness, it is impossible to escape those measures of providential chastisement which are necessary for our instruction and rebuke. When we fail to please God perfectly, He often withholds us from the honour we should otherwise have in the presence of our contemporaries. If the conscience is alive, we can scarcely fail to see in the many frustrations of life signs of inward moral defect, and be vexed by the sense of self-abasement. Some commentators make this the foremost aspect of the question that was occupying the Psalmist's thought, rather than the special feeling of shame which is allied to moral sensitiveness. He was in sore straits, and reproached by his adversaries, because his obedience to the Most High had not been thorough. And whilst this principle needs to be applied with care and delicate discrimination, it doubtless explains much in our life at which we are abashed. We have not been good enough to succeed in the best sense of the word. Defect of character shows itself in the humiliations under which we smart and the miserable futilities of our noblest plans. We

fail and are brought to confusion because we have come short in the presence of God's law. We dreamed of delectable gardens which we wished to make ready for the poor, the unprivileged, and the grief-laden, but the scenes of enterprise where we have spent ourselves are little better than plague-smitten bits of desert. The solitary place has not blossomed. The palaces we were to build are little better than crumbling, unfinished Babels that invite scorn. Our achievements are broken off. We have effected little. The Psalmist had in his mind a new secret of success when he exclaimed, "Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all Thy commandments."

What a mercy those who scrutinise our failures know so little of the grand purposes which were in our souls! We are ready to hide ourselves in the darkness as we think of these abortive schemes. We look back upon failure and confusion, confusion and failure. The Dead Sea fruit of dust and ashes rewards our toil, and but few grapes of Eshcol. We can almost hear the ironic laughter of the bystanders. It is well they do not know all our high dreams and early enthusiasms. Cheeks redden at the long, weary tale of failures. But God will turn the laughter of foes into praise, and make us prosper before their eyes, when nothing is wanting to the integrity of our obedience. If we break the least commandment, we shall have the last place in the kingdom of heaven.

What outrages we seem to suffer at the hands of Fate! We sometimes present as sorry a sight as the envoys from Jerusalem upon whom the young King of Ammon practised his wretched horseplay, cutting off their garments at the loins and slashing away one side of their beards, so that they were ashamed to go back into the city. We are made a spectacle to the scoffing world. The events in which we had resolved to act nobly have turned out to our dishonour, and we hang our heads in abasement. We want to hide ourselves. The public does not always respond to our wisest and most disinterested advances. But it may be that we have contributed to our own failure. We need to put on a more complete perfection, so that we may find deliverance from the ignominy which has hitherto dogged our steps. Our virtues have been both superficial and one-sided. But God has not destined us to defeat, obscurity, and shame; and by a more whole-hearted and uncompromising obedience, we must make ready for the better things He has in store for us.

Anthropologists tell us that low-grade savages compromise with the sense of shame by elaborate tattoo-markings. The geometric patterns, the pictured totems of the tribe with which they cover their limbs and bodies, the imitations of embroideries punctured and stained into the skin, are really a substitute for clothes. They are emblems without the reality. And *do we not too often seek to appease*

the sense of moral shame within us by a service which is imitative and specious?

It may be that we are zealous for a symbolic religion and ignore its broad and comprehensive ethic, or at least those parts of it that do not fit our inclinations. We inscribe ourselves with outward professions, and lack wholeness in our loyalty to the entire range of divine precepts. But in due time we shall find these specious pretences fail us, and bitter burning shame will possess and overwhelm our souls.

Whilst thinking of this subject of shame and its relation to character, our minds have gone back to the scene where the emotion first made itself felt in human nature. Another twilight will soon deepen, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out, and the hum of toil will ere long be hushed. When in the silence of that solemn twilight the voice of the Lord is again heard, will it find us, as it found our first parents, crushed by self-reproach and driven into hiding by a sense of dishonour? To be ashamed then will be the omen of a fiercer wilderness and a more forlorn exile. Abide in Christ by the daily fulfilment of His word, that you "may have boldness and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." Buy the white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear. Do not rest in an imperfect obedience. Make the Psalmist's prayer your own: "Let my heart be sound in Thy statutes, that I be not ashamed."

THE SERVICE OF PRAISE

By ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B

THE SERVICE OF PRAISE

"Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing."—PSALM C. 2.

SINGING is naturally associated with gladness. When the heart and the home are happy, or when health has been restored and vital energy is buoyant, most of us find it easy enough to sing praises. But the exhortation before us is unlimited. It appeals even to those whose days are dark, whose friends are few—and no songs are sweeter in the ears of God than those which sound forth as a pæan of victory over one's own nature: a triumph of faith and hope over despondency. As Wordsworth says:

"Gladness seems a duty! The faith be mine
That He who guides and governs all, approves,
When gratitude, though disciplined to look
Beyond these transient spheres, doth wear a crown
Of earthly hope, put on with trembling hand."

One reason for the maintenance of the service of song in the house of the Lord, is that it makes praisefulness easier of attainment to those who are heavy-hearted. Just as cheerful society will some-

times cause a misanthrope to forget his gloom, so the higher gladness of an inspired Christian congregation will often raise the drooping and awaken the dull, till they learn to "serve the Lord with gladness, and come before His presence with singing." Luther was quite right when he said, "Music is the art of the prophets, the only art that can calm the agitations of the soul: it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us." And it is no small privilege, no slight responsibility, to enjoy through musical gifts the opportunity and capacity for reaching out a helping hand to some who are struggling upward from a lower level of joy than they themselves are standing on, and to inspire faltering hearts with new courage, as Hopeful inspired Christian. This is the special calling of those who lead the songs of the sanctuary, and they fulfil it in proportion as both their hearts and their voices are attuned to the keynote of celestial praise.

> "God sent His singers upon earth,
> With songs of sadness and of mirth,
> That they might touch the hearts of men,
> And bring them back to heaven again."

I.

In thinking about the service of song in God's house, it is interesting to trace its development.

Like all living things, like all divinely inspired

things, it changes frequently in form, but always remains the same in essence.

From the beginning of their national history, the Israelites were wont to celebrate their deliverances and victories in song, though there appears to have been nothing of an organised character about this custom until the days of Samuel and David. An inspired prophetess, such as Miriam or Deborah, would suddenly and exultantly lead in popular song, or in some extemporised pæan, with accompaniment of timbrel and harp. So far back as patriarchal days, the successful digging of a well, which was a veritable "God-send" in an arid land, was accompanied by sacred song. Festal days were welcomed and victories were rejoiced over with trumpets and cymbals. And in the days of wilderness-wandering, the priests blew their trumpets when the camp was about to move, or when the benediction was to be pronounced.

These ceremonies, however, were not at first associated with public worship, nor were the people generally expected to take any part in them.

But when David rose to supreme power, a great change took place in both respects. Musical praise became an integral part of worship, and, at the same time, the worship was popularised, so that the people sang their own praises led by skilled musicians, and this function was no longer absorbed by priests. It is a curious fact, and one seldom recognised, that though David was a king "by Divine right," as few

kings ever have been, he was one of the most democratic leaders in history. He was essentially a man of the people. He lived for the people, loved the people, sang for the people, and taught the people to sing. He completely revolutionised the public worship of the Old Testament Church—and a larger choir and orchestra has rarely been gathered together than that which was created by his enthusiasm and princely generosity.

He set apart a whole tribe, and trained the people in it to celebrate God's praises in popular psalmody; and the fact that women joined with men, and children with their parents, is an indication that we are on the right lines when we object to having a jealously guarded chancel in which a choir of men and boys is expected to praise God as a substitute for the people. The more we combine good music with popular rendering, the nearer we come to the ideal which "the sweet singer of Israel" steadily kept before him—an ideal which was reached under his successor, when, at the dedication of the temple, "the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord"; in response not to preaching or even prayer, but to the people's outburst of praise, when the "trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord."

I have no doubt that David, king though he was, had many a prejudice to contend with from those who would rather that things stood still. The

musical service of Solomon was as different from that of Miriam as ours is from that of the psalm-singers at the time of the Commonwealth; but broad-minded Christians see that the mode of expressing praise is of secondary importance, so long as the old faith and the old sincerity remain. Some of us are proud to be called descendants of the Puritans. For my own part, I would rather have for my ancestor a Roundhead who fought for English liberties, than a duke, or even a king, who tried to repress them. We are justified in still contending for the essential principles which the Puritans fought for; but we must see to it that they *are* essentials, and not mere accidents of time or place. It is probable that if a stern Puritan, booted and spurred, marched up that aisle, he would be shocked at music some of us are glad to have, but his protest would be equally emphatic against artificial warmth and cushioned seats. He did without such things, and you could do the like. But we are not prepared to let our Puritan ancestor decide what is best for us, for that might not only lead us wrongly to abolish certain accessories of worship we are accustomed to, but might compel acceptance of his belief in witchcraft, and of his stern modes of dealing with those convicted of it. No; we believe that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." We hold that it is our solemn duty to decide for our own day what is best; as he decided in his day; seeking in a loyal and tractable spirit the guidance of Him who evermore dwells in the midst of His Church.

It is no small responsibility to direct and control the various portions of public religious worship, that each may have its own place, and discharge its proper function. On the one hand, we must not encourage people to come to God's house with the expectation that the minister shall instruct them, or even amuse them, for half an hour; while they regard all that is most worshipful in the service as a mere "preliminary" to the sermon. But, on the other hand, we must never allow appeals to conscience to be displaced by appeals to good taste, for that would be to transform the house of God into a sort of sanctified theatre, or an inferior concert hall. In our music, as well as in our meals, we must not give way to sumptuousness, nor yet to meagreness, but should provide the highest form of expression for the noblest spirit of praise; remembering that in all things and in all places, God is worthy of our very best. As the stream of Christian thought has become sweeter and purer and brighter, so let it be with the stream of Christian song, that it may reflect growing light and reveal broader possibilities as it does in that blessed land where men of all nations and tongues praise Him who sits upon the throne:

> "The Song
> Of heaven is ever new; for daily, thus,
> And nightly, new discoveries are made
> Of God's unbounded wisdom, power, and love,
> Which give the understanding larger room,
> And swell the hymn with ever-growing praise."

II.

Let me call your attention also to the enormous influence exercised by the service of praise.

It would be impossible to over-rate the influence of the Psalms, for example, in maintaining the spirituality of worship, in conserving the simplicity of faith, and in intensifying religious emotion.

But perhaps even more than under the old dispensation the influence of hymnology has been apparent in the history of the Christian Church. The early heretics known as the Gnostics exercised tremendous power over the people through their popular hymns. The Arians too, in their processions and songs, drew enormous crowds in the cities, and those attracted thus, not only came under the spell of the teachers, but were indoctrinated with errors which could not be readily forgotten, because they were embodied in some catching rhyme, set to a lilting tune. Their opponents, the so-called "Fathers" of the Church, saw this clearly enough. They believed, as Rowland Hill did, when he said in old Surrey Chapel, that he did not see why the devil should have all the best tunes. Accordingly they set forth the cardinal verities of the Christian faith in sonorous phrase, linked with effective music, which the people would eagerly listen to and readily remember. It is to them we owe the magnificent "Te Deum," which has never, for a single generation

since, ceased to ring through Christendom; everywhere setting forth the things most surely believed by all followers of Christ. The same may be said of the "Trisagion," or, as we more often call it, "The Gloria." It was originally composed by an orthodox bishop who intended, by means of it, to break the spell of a popular Arian song, which in sound was similar, though not in teaching. And in those solemn words the Church still expresses its belief in the Trinity—holy, indivisible, and eternal. "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

It would be very interesting to study the genesis of all these ancient songs. When we do so, we see in imagination the singing army of Christ, fighting the good fight of faith, against those who denied it, or misrepresented it. We behold brave Ambrose defending the Basilica in Milan day and night, lest it should be taken by unbelievers, cheering the hearts of the faithful meanwhile as he led them in the first singing of the "Te Deum." So has it been all through history. "Men learned in suffering, what they taught in song." The noblest hymns of trust and praise have ever arisen amid the clash of conflict; and this is surely typical, for the music of heaven will owe it fullest harmonies to the struggles and daily toils of earth.

In judging of our songs of praise, then, do not forget that they are not merely intended to express

our affection to God, our reverence for Him, our trust in Him, though that is an important part of their function. They are also meant to bear witness to truths too often forgotten, and to keep them in the memory of God's people in times of decaying faith. For example, the Scottish Reformers were wise when they sought to express, in rhymes which would be easily remembered, creeds and commandments, although it must be admitted that their intention was better than their poetry. Similarly, in Germany, such vital godliness as outlived destructive criticism, was not due so much to didactic teaching in universities and churches, but far more to the hymns of the German Reformers, and the lyrics of Gerhardt and Zinzendorf. In England, the evangelical fervour, which is still the inspiration of missions and philanthropies, is largely due to the hymns of Wesley and Watts, of Cowper and Doddridge. Therefore we have good reason to thank God for the songs of the sanctuary, and to rejoice that in all sections of the Church He still sends His singers upon earth.

If, then, you take part in the service of praise, and especially if you lead others in it, be mindful of your responsibility and privilege. You are called upon to make the highest possible use of music and of song, that, namely, which finds its place in the service of God; and in winging upward the aspirations of the soul, or in carrying home to the hearts of others some thought of a God they too often forget,

the culture of a devotional spirit is needed as well as the culture of a melodious voice. Doubtless many of our hymns contain descriptions of nature and set forth realities of human experience; but these are subordinate to their main theme—the praises of God. Sentiment, imagination, tender memories, pleasant rhythm, and sweet strains of music, are in worship only of value as they glorify God, and enable us to obey the command: "Serve the Lord with gladness, come before His presence with singing." For it is God who listens; it is He who speaks:

> "God's voice, not Nature's! Night and noon
> He sits upon the great white throne
> And listens for the creature's praise.
> What babble we of days and days?
> The dayspring He, whose days go on!"

III.

I ask you, then, as you join in the praises of the sanctuary, to regard your singing as the consecration of a gift to God — not as an occasion for pleasing yourself or gratifying others.

Indeed, I could give you no better counsel than that which was given many centuries ago to those who formed one of the earliest choirs of the Christian Church: "See that thou believe in thy heart what thou singest with thy mouth, and approve in thy works what thou believest in thy heart."

It would be almost unbearable, at least to musical people, if the choir sang in one key, while the organ was played in another; but there is a discord far worse than that in the ears of heaven—namely, the singing of God's praises with the lips, when the heart is out of harmony with His truth and His ways. In the deepest and broadest sense, the oft-quoted lines of our greatest dramatist are true:

> "How sour sweet music is,
> When time is broke, and no proportion kept."

May a praiseful soul ever accompany our praiseful words! Whenever we sing, may we at the same time make melody in our hearts unto the Lord. In the heavenly sphere the music of the soul outsings the music of the voice—and that inward singing we all may have, in nights of darkness as well as in days of sunshine; and thus we may "offer the sacrifice of praise continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name."

> "If we, with earnest effort, could succeed
> To make our life one long connected prayer,
> As lives of some perhaps have been and are:
> If—never leaving Thee—we had no need
> Our wandering spirits back again to lead
> Into Thy presence, but continued there,
> Like angels standing on the highest stair
> Of the sapphire throne—this were to pray indeed!
>
> "But if distractions manifold prevail,
> And if in this we must confess we fail,
> Grant us to keep at least a prompt desire,

Continual readiness for prayer and praise—
An altar heaped and waiting to take fire
With the least spark, and leap into a blaze!"

"Serve the Lord with gladness, and come before His presence with singing." Amen.

THE MAJESTY AND MYSTERY OF GOD

By ROBERT P. DOWNES, LL.D.

THE MAJESTY AND MYSTERY OF GOD

"Lo! these are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of Him?"—JOB xxvi. 14.

HOW little can we really know of God! Three great thoughts of the Infinite are revealed to us in Creation, Providence, and Redemption; but what are these when compared with the vast designs, unknown to us, which yet occupy the mind of the Eternal? We look upon the sunbeam, but the sun itself is too glorious for our gaze. We analyse the drop, but the great ocean stretches beyond us boundless and unexpected. The Infinite cannot reveal Himself to the finite, except as One past finding out. In Him who inhabiteth eternity there are and ever must be mysteries unresolved, abysses unfathomed and unfathomable, so that the sublime challenge may be everlastingly renewed, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?"

Of this truth none of the inspired writers seem more deeply conscious than the writer of the Book of

Job. Hence in the chapter before us, after traversing creation in thought to contemplate the glory of God and the works of His power; after considering the splendours with which He has garnished the heavens, and the art by which He has hung the earth upon nothing; bowing at last under the pressure of thoughts too high for man, the solemn confession escapes his lips, "Lo, these are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of Him."

I.

We will consider these words first as a testimony to the glory in God.

How great is the glory of that Being of whose ways all His creatures, from man to the first-born Seraph, see but a part, or, as the text implies in the original, the mere fringes and lower endings!

Look at the manifestations of Divine power which confront us in the universe. Think of the power implied in the act of *creation*—a power which to our minds is absolutely inconceivable, because we pass to something in God for which we have no equivalent in ourselves. Men or angels may conceive, design, or mould, but they cannot create. Give man the materials, and he may pile up the pyramids or build a vast cathedral. Give an angel the materials, and he may fashion out of them a structure of which, perhaps, we are able to form no adequate conception. But

neither man nor angel can bring into existence a sand-grain or a leaf from mere nothingness. And yet the vast universe which blooms and shines around has had a beginning. It could not create itself, for that would imply that it acted before it existed, which is a manifest absurdity. It is not eternal, as it is continually changing, and we can chase it back in thought to a mere nebulous vapour. It had a beginning, and "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." He first threw the outlines of creation over the rayless universe of darkness. He created the primal atoms with their potencies and their laws, and beneath His glance the grand panorama gradually evolved until all this mighty system of suns and planets trembled into being.

And that which He at first created He momently *sustains*, or it would vanish like a bubble on the wave. His sustaining energy is indeed but a continual repetition of the act of creation. He rolls the clouds which else were motionless; He fires the sunbeam which else would not shine; the angels who excel in strength excel through Him, catching from His presence alike the glory which gilds the pinion and the love which fires the soul. That perennial freshness, that exhaustless energy which permeates the universe, is but the breath and immanence of God filling and controlling all things as the human soul fills and controls the human body. He has not made the universe and put it out of His hands, as a human mechanician makes a clock and leaves it. It

is continually permeated by the energy of its immanent yet transcendent Creator. In Him it lives and moves and has its being. Hence the conviction forced upon our later scientists that the energy which we call force is not a property of matter, but something superadded from another source—that it is indeed nothing but the exhaustless energy of God, inherent and ever active in creation. Here is the secret of the wisdom which appears in insensate things. The march of the universe is a sublime melody, a rhythmic song; and the author of that melody is God. The stars did not meet in council and ordain the orbits in which they should move through the vast stellar sea without accident or collision. The comet drew no outline for its wide wanderings through the abyss of space.

> "The skill which wields the elements, the thought
> Which pierces the dim universe like light—
> These are the Lord's."

Yet! "Lo! these are parts of His ways, and how little a portion is heard of Him." How *inconceivably vast* is the universe which is controlled by His wisdom and sustained by His energy! We know that our little planet is 93,000,000 miles distant from the sun, whose diameter is so vast that 100 suns strung in a straight line would touch our earth. The sun, again, with its attendant planets, is sweeping round the centre of its own orbit at the rate of 400,000 miles a day, and it will take it 18,000,000

years to complete one revolution. The starry heavens reveal to telescopic vision about 20,000,000 worlds. There are many thousands of clusters of stars visible, some of them capable of packing away in their awful bosoms hundreds of such systems as ours. And still these are but mere fragments and fringes of the limitless universe. When Herschel raised his great telescope to the midnight sky it was thought that he had sighted the furthest star, and that all beyond was blank, unpeopled space. They therefore carved on his tomb the proud epitaph: "He burst the barriers of the heavens." This idea, however, is utterly exploded now. Since Herschel's time, dust-like shoals of stars, shining films of firmaments, have been discerned, retreating and hovering through space of which he never dreamed. In nebula separated from nebula by trillions of leagues, in plane beyond plane, they stretch and glitter to the feet of God, until the human heart quails before a grandeur which frightens and appals it. Yet, "Lo! these are parts of His ways, and how little a portion is heard of Him." These are but the whispers and not the thunders of His power who has created all things—mere fringes of that stellar sea

> "Whose waves are suns that break upon the shore
> Of God's infinity for evermore."

II.

Let us consider the words of our text as a helpful consideration amid the mysteries which confront us in the sphere of the Divine Government.

Here, as elsewhere, our knowledge is a drop, our ignorance a sea. Beholding but parts of the ways of God, and beholding those but brokenly and imperfectly, it is not for us to criticise the Divine procedure or to assume the dignity of arbitrators with regard to it.

The great Bishop Butler, in one of the profoundest books in our language, lays down the important principle that the government of God in this world is a scheme imperfectly understood. As we study the movements of His providence and the unfoldings of His purpose, we find ourselves continually in the position of finite minds attempting infinite problems. Where to us all is mystery, to God all is clear. Where to us there appear to be endless contradictions, to God all is perfect harmony. We can only know the whole when we know each part which constitutes the whole. We can only find the final reason for anything when we know the final reason for everything.

It is evident, as Goethe tells us, that we are not born into this world to solve the problem of the universe, but merely to find out where that problem

begins, and then to restrain ourselves within the limits of the comprehensible. All the men who have laboured to solve this mighty problem, from Voltaire to Carlyle, and from Hegel to Fichte, have only broken their wings against the bars of their cage. There are limits to the intellect of man as well as to the chafing and restless sea, and God has said to the human mind as to the great ocean: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." We may push our inquiries as far as we can, but sooner or later we reach a veil of mystery which we cannot pierce.

It is not, therefore, for us to pass judgment on the ways of God. We should smile if we heard an insect, occupying some crevice of the roof of a great cathedral, criticising the wisdom or the folly of the architect. Just so must angels smile when they hear men, with their limited faculties and their finite comprehension, criticising the stupendous purposes of God.

Alfonso, King of Spain, said that if God had called him into His presence-chamber, he could have created a better solar system than that of which our earth is a part. The mistake, however, was not God's, but that of Alfonso, who was reasoning from the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, which offers such an imperfect and erroneous idea of the structure of the universe. In his presumptuous folly, Alfonso imputed his ignorance to the God who made the

stars. It would have been better if he had said with Job: "Lo! these are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of Him."

In the same way, baffled by the mystery of human sin and sorrow, John Stuart Mill declared that if a God existed, He must be limited either in benevolence, or in power, or He would surely heal the miseries of the world. One day, however, the perplexed thinker will learn that God is limited in neither of these attributes, and that all the confusions of the world will not hold back

> "That one far-off divine event,
> To which the whole creation moves."

When Sir Isaac Newton was labouring to demonstrate his great discovery of the law of gravitation, he was for some time perplexed by the fact that certain planets, feeling the pull of other worlds, did not move in perfect orbits, but sagged and faltered in their course. This created in him the fear that the order of the universe might not be complete, and that his mighty generalisation might be at fault. But a deeper observation taught him that this partial aberration of the stars was perfectly compatible with the permanent order of the heavens, that, indeed, the harmony of the cosmos was perfect and complete.

So in our brief life we are frequently baffled by the mystery of events, and it would sometimes appear as if in the moral universe things had

slipped from leash and from divine control, but "Lo! these are parts of His ways." When His purpose, who governs all things, is complete, we shall find that they are ordered with infinite wisdom and with unfaltering love. That is a glorious anthem which, in the consummation of all things, shall go pealing up to God from all the voices of heaven: "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of Saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name; for Thou only art Holy; for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgments are made manifest."

When the judgments of God are made manifest, when the picture is completed, of which we now see only the initial outlines, when the mighty melody rolls forth in its sublime and perfect harmony, of which we now hear only a few sad cadences and broken chords, *then* we shall learn that God has done all things well. Meanwhile, we say, amid the mysteries which baffle us and the calamities and miseries which bow our heads in sorrow and in pain: "Lo! these are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of Him."

III.

Let us consider the words of our text as a needful admonition to the votaries of physical science.

One of the leading characteristics of this century is its deep interest in physical science. But we must remember that the votary of physical study is a specialist, and that the tendency of every specialist is to isolate himself from fields of knowledge which do not come within his own sphere. The confession of Charles Darwin is very significant where he tells us, with his usual honesty, that as the result of his ardent devotion to the study of physical phenomena, he lost all taste for poetry and imaginative literature. Now, it is evident that except in his own sphere of inquiry such a man would be a most unreliable guide. We must be on our guard against the conclusions of physical science when, stepping beyond her legitimate province, she attempts to dogmatise about things which lie beyond her ken. Too often she is tempted to deny spiritual realities because they are incapable of that logical demonstration which is possible with regard to physical facts, and thus to plunge us into the dark gulf of materialism. We need to say to the scientific thinker: "Your studies are commendable and useful, but remember that 'these are but part of His ways' who created all things." Spirit is as

real as matter, for God is a Spirit. Supernatural laws and relations are as real as those of nature, and will abide

"When all that seems shall suffer shock."

We must gives its rightful place to the spiritual part of our nature, with its rich dowry of faculties and aspirations. God is as great a reality to the spiritual consciousness of the man who trusts and worships as the outward universe is to the intellectual consciousness of the scientist. We have faith in the veracity of the reports given in by our higher faculties—"the instinct of the intellect which demands an adequate cause for the phenomena which we note around us; the solemn monitions of the conscience which demand a moral law-giver; the ideal longing of the imagination which conceives of a Being altogether perfect and beautiful." We object to the philosophy which would link our nature only with the dust. All things low do indeed touch us, but all things high meet in us also and thrill us with celestial tidings. Matter and spirit, earth and heaven, man and God, time and eternity, all touch us, for we are related to them all. We admit the reality of the reports given in through the faculties of vision, and taste, and touch; but "Lo! these are parts of His ways, and how little a portion is heard of Him."

IV.

We may consider the words of our text as an incentive to the Church's faith.

The faith of the Church is oft-times darkened, and the "Where is the promise of His coming?" of the doubters swells into a deeper murmur as they mark the slow progress of the gospel in this and other lands. This difficulty is chiefly the result of human impatience, and it also arises from our ignorance of the progress really made. Our human life is so short, and the development of God's great purposes is so deliberate and so prolonged, that there is little wonder that the progress of His kingdom should appear to us tardy and inadequate. Let us, however, remember that "these are but parts of His ways." If there be any seeming delay in God, it is only such delay as belongs to the steps of majesty. Faith and patience are not at all incompatible, nor protraction and mystery, with the certainty and glory of the issue of the great struggle now being waged in the world between light and darkness, holiness and sin.

We must remember the law, that, in proportion to the greatness of any given thing, it is slow in its development. An arch of flowers is soon raised and soon withered: an arch of marble is long a-building, but it stands long. We know now that the world took ages to create. Why, then, should we expect it will be regenerated in a few centuries? God knows

the final and triumphant issue, and without haste and without rest He is advancing towards it. Let us wait His time, with whom a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day, assured that He is not "slack concerning His promise," but that

"Ever through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the reign of Christ is widened with the process of the suns."

The world in which we move is not yet righteous and good, but the God who governs it, is, and He will assuredly in His own time subdue it to His own righteousness and goodness. The redeeming Lord in whom we trust does not lie in some Syrian grave

"On which the Syrian stars look down,"

but is risen, enthroned, triumphant, expectant, calmly waiting until His enemies shall be made His footstool.

Let no man say that Christianity has failed. Christianity lays its hand on the future. It has its record in the skies. It is as yet but a mighty germ. Give it time to grow. The power that shook, demands only time to change and regenerate the world. Meanwhile, all things bid us hope. Polluted and darkened as they are, the nations yet rise to a higher and yet higher level. They snap the chains of despotism, they cry for the light, they advance socially, politically, and morally. Many marks of progress are visible to us which were hidden from

our fathers—those noble workers of the past in whom the hope was bright although the vision was dim. And "Lo! these are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of Him." Doubt not that He is working where we see no sign of His advance. His resources are fully equal to the great ends which He has set before Him, and we may rest in faith

> "That man's perfection is the crowning flower
> Towards which the urgent sap in life's great tree
> Is pressing—seen in puny blossoms now,
> But on the world's great morrows to expand,
> With broadest petal and with deepest glow."

V.

We may consider our text as a comfort to the Church in sorrow.

Let any who are bowed down by trial and adversity remember that "these are but parts of His ways." Our years are not all winters, "the blue of heaven is larger than the cloud." There is more joy than pain in the world. There is more love than hate. There are more songs than sighs. Furthermore, if we are stung by the mystery of pain, we do but share the common lot. Unless we wish to be separated from the great brotherhood and sisterhood of our race, we must bow beneath the burden of sorrow and feel the thrill of pain. Sorrow is universal; and because it is so common, it must have a beneficent ministry.

Otherwise it would be banished from the empire of a loving God.

And how potent, in our own case, has been its ministry. We frequently live under a cloud, and it is well it should be so. Like the flower, we need for our growth not only the sunlight but the blessing of the rain. We need not only the garish day, but the tender intercession of the overshadowing night. The strokes of sorrow, like those of the sculptor on the marble, have shaped us into beauty. The bitter blasts have strengthened the fibres and deepened the roots of virtue. We have learnt pity through our sorrows. "We can hardly," says George Eliot, "learn humility and tenderness enough except by suffering." How hard and selfish and unsympathetic we should be, if we had never known sorrow.

Furthermore, let us think of the future. "Weeping may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning." "Lo! these are parts of His ways." The reason we are so perplexed and crushed by our calamities is because we fancy we are going to be here for ever. As an old divine has said: "If we realised that our human life is but the stopping for a night at an inn to go forth again in the morning, we should not be so troubled about the insufficiency of the accommodation." It is only because we think we are going to stay here for ever, that we are so depressed and discouraged. St Paul, whose life was so shot through with trial and bitterness, stands on one occasion with his back against the gates of

heaven, and as the celestial glory shines out upon his earthly sorrows, they seem only as motes in the sunbeam, and he breaks forth in the triumphant utterance: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." We are not going to be here for ever. The battle and the pain and the mystery will soon cease;

> "For be the day weary, or be the day long,
> At last it ringeth to evensong."

We do well to ponder the simple yet unfathomable words of our text. They teach us that mystery is not incompatible with faith, since we cannot fathom the purposes of the Eternal. They teach us how our present sorrow may work out for us everlasting glory. They teach us that it is our wisdom to keep step and chime with the holy and the true, patiently waiting for the radiance which shall either clear up the mysteries which baffle us, or leave us contented with our ignorance.

> "We cannot see the secret things
> In this our dark abode;
> We may not reach with earthly wings
> The heights and depths of God.
>
> "So faith and patience, wait awhile,
> Not doubting, nor in fear,
> For soon in Heaven our Father's smile
> Will render all things clear.

"Then shall He end Time's short eclipse,
Its dim, uncertain night,
Bring in the grand Apocalypse,
Reveal the perfect light."

"Lo! these are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of Him."

THE DETECTIVE POWER OF SIN

By JOHN C. LAMBERT, D.D.

THE DETECTIVE POWER OF SIN

"Be sure your sin will find you out."—NUMBERS xxxii. 23.

THE question is sometimes asked with regard to the historical books of the Old Testament: What is there about these books that entitles them to be regarded as peculiarly sacred or divine? In what sense can this history be called sacred any more than the history of the early kings of Rome or the Saxon Heptarchy in England? Is it not as full as other histories of events which to the ordinary eye appear to be perfectly secular or worse than secular—falsehoods, impurities, and frauds, cruel murders and bloody wars? Does it not, as much as those others, correspond to Gibbon's famous definition of history as "little more than a register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind?"

Well, no doubt it is true that most of the events recorded in the historical books of the Old Testament are secular enough when considered in themselves. But there are two features of this Old Testament history that vindicate its right to be called sacred. One is the fact that it embodies a great progressive revelation. Though the narrative may be secular

in most of its details, no one can read it so as to grasp its broad spirit without discovering that it contains the record of a gradually advancing revelation of God given in the history of a peculiar people, a revelation such as no other nation of antiquity can claim, and which entirely distinguishes the history of Israel from that of any other race. And further, there is the fact that every now and then, even in these historical books, we come upon a clear and unmistakable prophetic word, announcing a deep moral truth or a far-reaching spiritual principle, that flashes out of the mass of secular details like a priceless diamond seen by a miner suddenly gleaming out from the clay and the stones.

In the verse before us we find an illustration of what has just been said—"Be sure your sin will find you out." We may not remember the particular historical circumstances in which this prophetic warning was first uttered. But the words themselves express certain great, unforgettable, spiritual truths; and it is to these underlying spiritual principles of the text that we shall turn our attention for a little.

I.

In the first place, the text suggests the general principle that sin is certain to be found out.

In the world in which we live there is a law at work that is hostile to the concealment of sin. The familiar proverb says that "Murder will out"; but,

like most proverbs, this one may be applied to a great many things besides the one that is mentioned, for it is equally true that stealing will out, and falsehood will out, and drunkenness will out. No doubt, discovery may be long postponed. For sentence against an evil work is not always executed speedily. The mills of God grind slowly. The chariot wheels of the heavenly Judge seem to delay their coming. But though they tarry long, they will surely come at last—and then they will not tarry. The ancients said that Nemesis, the goddess of vengeance, was slow in her movements, being lame of her feet; but though she was slow, she never failed to catch her victim, for while he was sleeping she was still pursuing. And they believed that dumb nature herself—the very birds of the air, the very waves of the sea, the very trees of the wood, the very stones of the street—would cry aloud to prevent a crime from being concealed.

In Hood's powerful ballad, "The Dream of Eugene Aram," which is founded, as you are aware, on an actual case, we have a kind of allegory of this very truth on which I am dwelling. Eugene Aram had murdered a man and cast his body into the river—"A sluggish water, black as ink, the depth was so extreme." Next morning he visited the place, and this was what he saw :—

> "I sought the black, accursèd pool,
> With a wild, misgiving eye;
> And I saw the Dead in the river bed,
> For the faithless stream was dry."

Upon this he covered the corpse with heaps of leaves; but now a mighty wind swept through the wood, and once more laid his secret bare before the eyes of the sun.

> "Then down I cast me on my face,
> And first began to weep,
> For I knew my secret then was one
> That earth refused to keep:
> Or land or sea, though he should be
> Ten thousand fathoms deep."

In Greek history we read of a man named Ibycus who lived five centuries before the birth of Christ, and was a popular poet in his own generation. While travelling through an unfrequented region near Corinth, he was set upon by a band of robbers and mortally wounded. As he was on the point of expiring he saw a flock of cranes that happened just then to be flying overhead, and in the absence of any human helper, he called aloud with his last breath upon those birds of the air to avenge his cruel death. Not long afterwards there was a great gathering in the theatre of Corinth, which, like all the theatres of ancient Greece, stood open to the sky. Among the crowd sat one of the murderers of Ibycus. The drama was going on when suddenly a flock of cranes appeared on the horizon. They drew nearer and nearer until at last they seemed to stop and hover in the air right above the heads of the audience. The conscience-stricken murderer, seized with terror, instinctively exclaimed, "Behold the avengers of

Ibycus!" His words were overheard, and he was seized and put on trial. He confessed the guilt of himself and his accomplices, and all of them were sentenced to death.

Some of us can remember great crimes that were unearthed in ways hardly less striking and dramatic than this. For a time it seemed as if there was no possibility of discovery. But by strange links of circumstance the deed of darkness was brought to the light, and the guilty one was punished.

But now, to get at the whole truth of this principle, we need to extend our view beyond the horizon of this present world. For there *are* crimes whose authors are never brought before any human tribunal, there are secret sins which no one in all the world knows of but the person who commits them. A great spiritual principle, however, like the one of which we are thinking, does not exhaust itself when it touches the horizon of this present world. It runs on into the world that is unseen; and we must follow it there if we would see the truth in its continuity and wholeness.

There is a life to come which is only a prolongation of the life we are living now. The arguments that go to prove this are numerous, but none is more powerful than the moral argument drawn from the fact that in this world good and evil do not meet with their just rewards, and some men's sins are never found out. A man who lives by cheating and lying walks abroad as an honest citizen. The

seducer mingles unchallenged with the best society, while his unfortunate victim, "weary of breath," casts herself in her despair into the dark and silent river. Brethren, if we believe that there is a God in heaven, if we hold to the reality of moral distinctions, if we will but listen for one moment to the testimony of our own conscience, we are compelled to anticipate, in view of such things, a time of reckoning when God shall reward every man according to his deeds. "My Lord Cardinal," said the unhappy French queen to Richelieu, "God does not pay at the end of every week; but at the last *He pays*." Of this natural conviction of the human heart the Bible brings us the assurance. It certifies that a day is coming when the dead, small and great, shall stand before God; and the books shall be opened; and the dead shall be judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works.

II.

But notice now another principle announced by the text. Not only is sin sure to be discovered, but it is sin that detects and exposes sin: it is a man's own sin that finds him out.

There is in sin a detective and self-revealing quality which sooner or later tells its tale. Sometimes we find that when a sin is found out it is by the sinner's

own confession. He carries within him an accusing conscience that will not let him rest, that makes him feel that punishment, and even death, are preferable to concealment. Often, again, when sin appears to have been discovered by others, it is not so much they who have discovered it as the sinner himself who has unwittingly revealed it. There is something about his look, or his manner, or his actions, that excites suspicion and challenges attention. Like Cain of old, he bears the mark of his guilt upon his brow. So it was with the schoolmaster, Eugene Aram. He was so haunted by his secret, night and day, that his looks and his habits and the strange stories he told to his pupils pointed him out as a man who was carrying about the burden of some fearful crime. So it was in the case of the murderers of Ibycus. It was not the cranes that proclaimed the crime. It was the man himself, conscious-stricken by the sudden appearance of the birds, who cried out involuntarily, "Behold the avengers of Ibycus!"

But when we speak of sin as being self-detected and self-exposed, we must not think only of cases such as these. We are really face to face here with the universal law of cause and effect; for it is only an application of that law to the spiritual sphere when we say that every sin produces its appropriate consequences. Well, it is these consequences, these natural and inevitable consequences, that stand forth beyond everything else as the revealers and exposers of wrongdoing. A man may sin in a dark place, and

flatter himself that no one can know what he has done. But the unfaltering operations of the natural law of cause and consequence defeat him in due time, and what was done in secret is proclaimed at last upon the housetops. Have we not seen it with our own eyes? Have we not known a man who began to indulge in some vice of the flesh—all unsuspected of his neighbours? But by and by, as time went on, it began to be seen that God is not mocked, that whatsoever a man soweth that also must he reap. And in the end it almost seemed as if God had written down upon the very countenance of that man a description of his real life, which might be read by every passer-by.

III.

There is yet another principle involved in the text. Sin, we have learned, is sure to be found out; and it is found out by means of its own self-revealing qualities. But now notice that sin finds out the sinner himself: "Be sure your sin will find *you* out."

There is no more awful experience in human life than to see the persistent and inflexible way in which a man's sins come back to him, and dog his footsteps, and haunt his soul, and point at him with accusing finger, and insist, in short, on finding him out. George Eliot has taught this lesson more powerfully perhaps than any other writer of modern times. Again and

again she shows how a single sin, committed long years ago, not merely bears its appointed fruit, but comes back at last to the author of it laden with these accumulated results, and casts them down at his feet saying, "These fruits of sin are yours." The poor, shivering soul would like to disown them then; but he cannot. They *are* all *his*. His own iniquities have taken him, and he is holden with the cords of his own sin. He set the stone rolling, and now it has returned upon him. He broke through the hedge of the divine law, and the serpent that was lurking there has bitten him.

But it is not till we think again of the world to come that we understand the full truth of the proposition that sin finds out the sinner. For in this life a man can never be fully overtaken by his sin. Sometimes he seems to elude it altogether, and in any case, owing to that law by which our acts spread themselves out in ever-widening circles of consequence, he never knows to their uttermost extremity the dismal results of what he has done. But there is a time coming when he shall be able to escape his sin no longer, when it shall overtake him, and lay its iron clutch upon his shoulder, and stare him in the face, and find him out to the bottom of his soul.

1. Our sin will find us out *by the pathway of the memory*. In this life we forget most of our sins. And yet psychologists tell us that memory never really loses anything. Things pass from our consciousness and seem to be utterly forgotten; but they are only lying

below the surface of the mind, ready to rise again into vivid life in their own time. Now and then we get slight hints of these mysterious potentialities of our being. Events long buried in the abyss of our forgotten years suddenly come back to us like half-remembered dreams. Some unwonted circumstance serves as the key to a secret spring, and straightway the locked chambers of the soul fly open. And this is only the merest suggestion of what must take place in the day when the Lord judges the secrets of the heart. Then our sins will all return to our memories, and stand before us, and find us out.

But, again, our sin will find us out *because it will meet us face to face in its true nature.* Rarely do we choose sin simply as sin, for

> "Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
> As, to be hated, needs but to be seen."

We think, rather, of the pleasures of sin. We try to deceive ourselves. We clothe our vices in the fairest masks we can find, and strive to forget that a hideous death's-head lies behind. But in the day of the revelation of God's righteous judgments, our sins shall appear before us in their bare and horrible ugliness—not as angels of light, not as veiled seductive figures in some thrilling masque, but as foul spectres of the darkness whose very aspect shall make us shudder and quake.

3. Once more, your sin will find you out *because*

you shall know it in all its farthest consequences. You never know in this world the full consequences of your evil deeds. In the far-off past you wronged the soul of a fellow-creature—a man, or it might be a woman. You degraded someone's ideals by your low views of life. You spoiled someone's faith by sneering at the truth. You ruined some innocent life, it may be, by your impurity. Where are those wronged souls now? Gone—gone! Lost from your sight in the wide world, or even in the vast eternity. You do not know how your sins have been ripening and scattering through the years—spreading, as sins do, from soul to soul. But at last those sins will find you out, and bring their accusation against you as the author of them all. The ghosts of your past deeds shall come trooping into your presence, a dreadful, ghastly throng. At first you will not recognise them; but soon you will see that all those spirit-faces have a family likeness, like that which Macbeth perceived in the long line of the ghosts of Banquo's house. And then you will know that these are your own sins, your own spiritual progeny, which have found you out, and have come to bear you company. And when these things happen to a man, he will begin to be in hell. For what worse torment could be imagined than to be compelled to remember all one's past sins, to be compelled to see them in their naked hideousness, to be compelled to acknowledge them in their far-stretching consequences as

one's very own? Mediæval theologians pictured the abode of the lost as a vast furnace filled with leaping tongues of flame. Dante pictured it, no less awfully, as a realm of thick-ribbed everlasting ice, the breath of which was sufficent to freeze both body and spirit. But think of the state of a man whose sins have found him out, who has to say, "Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell."

Thank God! there is a way of escape from the fear of a hell like that—the way of Christian penitence and faith. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." At times it seems to us as if there were no possible escape from the grinding mills of retribution; but mercifully for us, we have to deal in this matter with a personal Will, and not merely with an impersonal law. The natural consequences of sin cannot be wiped out; that is true. But God is ready to pardon us, and to restore us to His loving favour. He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. He can purge the evil out of our hearts by the operation of His Holy Spirit. He can take a seemingly wasted life and make it even yet a life of blessing and honour in His Kingdom. To every sinner He sends this pleading message: "Turn ye, turn ye; for why will

ye die?" But for all who will not turn from their evil ways, who will not come through Christ unto God, there stands this testimony of the everlasting law: "Be sure your sin will find you out."

THE UNSEEN ALLIES OF THE FAITHFUL

By J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

THE UNSEEN ALLIES OF THE FAITHFUL

"Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."—2 KINGS vi. 16.

A GREAT host of soldiers, with all their noble captains and military weapons, had been sent to capture one unarmed man, one unprotected prophet, and bring him prisoner to the Syrian king. They came by night, and surrounded the city where he was dwelling. They stationed themselves before every gate and outlet. They made sure of him. Early in the morning his servant espied the encompassing army, and went back trembling to tell his master of the trap in which they were caught. "Alas, master, what shall we do?" Here were ten thousand men with their battering-rams and swords, determined to take him alive or dead, and Elisha had no weapons and no allies, none but himself and his frightened follower. No wonder that the servant gave way to panic. But the master, without the least heart-fluttering or nervous tremor, answered cheerily: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them"; and then, pitying his

white-faced, shivering companion, he looked up to heaven for a moment, and added: "Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see."

Straightway, says the story, a veil dropped from the young man's eyes, and he saw also, what the prophet had seen throughout—that over the city and in the mountain beyond, there were other armies watching—the armies of heaven; those forces of God which mortal eyes never see until the prayer of faith has opened them. There they stood, the hosts of the Almighty, waiting the signal, ready to descend when the need came, to fight this man's battle and scatter his foes. Now, I offer no explanation of the vision. I do not know or care whether those heavenly armies were real and the prophet truly saw them, or whether the whole scene is intended as a figure of invisible and spiritual things: I leave that, and fix my thoughts on the great religious and moral fact which is embodied in the story and expressed in Elisha's words: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."

I.

Now, I wish to remind you, first, that in every part of God's book we have this truth forced upon us: that the conquering and might-giving forces of the world are the unseen forces.

The strong, brave, fearless man is he who believes

in the invisible allies, and sets them above all that he can see and count. The men of the world take stock of material resources. They number the men and the machines, the weapons and the wealth, and all the visible helps on which they can rely. They count heads; they measure masses; they ask the size of the majority, and if they have all these things with them, they feel that they are on the winning side. But turn to the men of the Bible and you find all that reversed. There is little account taken of numbers and masses; huge figures are treated as cyphers, a grain of faith outweighs the resources of a kingdom. All the heroic men whose deeds are recorded there speak one language about these things—the language of assured confidence and quiet disdain. They fling scorn upon the weapons of flesh and rely upon invisible armour and defence. We see them alone, unsupported, unarmed, threatened and opposed by innumerable foes, yet undismayed and as serenely strong as if all the legions of heaven were waiting at their bidding. Moses defying the might of Egypt; Gideon with his little regiment charging the vast array of Midianites; Jonathan with a single companion attacking an army of Philistines; Elijah in solitary grandeur confronting the furious rabble of Baal's prophets; Daniel setting at nought the king, princes, and nobles of Babylon; John the Baptist sternly rebuking that incestuous Herod whom all men feared and flattered; Peter and John continuing their witness in defiance of the

magistrates; Stephen standing firm before the mob that stoned him; Paul on Mars' Hill preaching of the Resurrection to a sceptical and mocking crowd; and above all, Jesus in the garden and on the cross forsaken of all men, treading His wine-press alone, yet confident that He would overcome, and draw all men to Him.

These are all magnificent figures. They show us man made superhuman. They are pictures of courage, sublime resolution and quenchless hope, which have all the colour of romance on a background of solid fact and truth. Unseen things were a mighty reality to these men, whatever they may be to us. The forces on which they leaned not only scattered their fears, but inspired them with an extraordinary cheerfulness. They never show the downcast look of men engaged in a losing cause. They have their depressions, but they are only the moods of an hour. Victory is written on their faces. There is the tone of triumph in their voices. They stand upon firm rock amid the heaving waves of human rage and sin, declaring "None of these things move me." For they know that certain irresistible and everlasting forces are working for them. God's will and unchanging purpose are on their side, and only the fickle whims and passions of men against. Omnipotence is their servant, time, eternity, truth and right are their allies; and all the greatest things present and to come are working together for their ultimate success.

Verily, the strength of God's strong men has never been in numbers, magnitude and masses. Out of weakness they have been made strong. They have always been contemptibly few in count of heads. The saints and prophets were grand exceptions; the martyrs stood alone; the truth-seekers pioneered the way in solitude. There were twelve apostles against the Roman empire. There was one lonely Christ against the world; one *cross* shining like a beacon-light over a great dark ocean of selfishness and guilt; one weak and silent sufferer against all the powers of darkness, against all the immeasurable forces of prejudice, priestcraft, politics, and government. And yet the things which were crucified in weakness have been raised in power, and the feeble ones who battled against mighty odds have been crowned with victory. Through all the temporary failures and defeats and shattered hopes and broken lives and broken hearts of sad and long-delaying times, God's mighty purpose has been moving on with undeviating steps. And the whole of human history proves what Elisha and those other men from Abraham to Christ believed: that invisible forces are the greatest and the conquering forces in the world, and that "more are they that be with us than all that be with them."

II.

It is in these unseen forces that all godly men to-day find the secret of their strength.

No matter what our work is, or what our battle is, there is a wonderful consciousness of power given to those who believe that they are working in the way of God, that righteousness, justice, and truth are their shield, and that omnipotence is pledged and promised on their side. Faith, if not actually compassed about by invisible armies, is nerved, inspired, and energised by thoughts, upliftings, and confidences which make a man more than a match for his fellow-men. Even in ordinary warfare that is not a thing of the past. There is still no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.

We have been told so often in modern times that battles are decided by numbers, skill, and perfection of weapons, that we have come to believe it, and almost to laugh at those who take into account other forces. Yet sometimes we have it driven home to us in humiliating ways that these other forces are still to be reckoned with: that men who go into the battle with the Bible in their hands and a prayer upon their lips are terribly hard to beat, and that soldiers, be they never so brave and well armed, want one thing more to make them victorious, and that one thing is the conviction that their cause is just, and that they can look for higher help as they grapple with

the foe. It is too often proved, even now, that the nation leans upon a bruised reed which relies wholly upon its armaments and numbers, and does not commit its cause and its destinies to the One who judges righteously, and helps those who fear Him.

And as in warfare, so in every work that a man has to do; if he feels that he has God on his side, he carries in his hands the strength of two or more than two. You can bear disappointments, and even failure in business, and the long delays which wear out the heart's patience, and smile with contempt upon the swift successes which craft and roguery win, if righteousness is the girdle of your loins, if there is within you a conscience void of offence, and if you believe that God knoweth the way that you take and approves it. There is always a grand reserve force behind you of promise and good cheer and unlimited patience which the world cannot see; and ever in your hearts, through all the days and nights of trial, waiting, and anxious sorrow, there rises the glad confession: "If God be for us, who can be against?" It is a tremendous help to know that we are not fighting our battle and bearing our burden alone, but that over and around us are the forces which helped the prophet in his prison and the Saviour in His Gethsemane, and which still come at the summons of prayer.

Most of all do we feel this in the battle which good men are perpetually carrying on against the evil powers of this world. The earnest believers,

the truly Christ-like men and women, are always a small minority; and they have opposed to them a formidable, an almost overpowering mass of indifference, unbelief, selfishness, greed, impurity, fleshly lust, and devilry. To the outward eye the fight seems most unequal. The odds are all in favour of the evil side. We who love God are over-matched at every point. Yet we never lose heart until we have lost all faith! We take hold of unseen forces and feel at once: "More are they that be with us than they that be with them." We are stronger than they. We speak with authority, because we speak in a higher name.

A good man has more power and more influence than ten unrighteous men. He has allies in his own heart, he has helpers even in their hearts. For there are forces in every man that secretly side with the good—there are conscience and memory and a sense of unrest, and a fear of judgment to come. A hundred things which are against him and for us. And we have the assurance that right must win, that truth must prevail, that God's purpose cannot fail, that He and not the rulers of darkness is King over the earth; that His promises can never be broken, that His will must be done. These are the unseen forces which fill our hearts with secret power, and make us confident that we are on the winning side. "More are they that be with us than they that be with them."

III.

And, lastly, great and many beyond all count and measurement are the forces which help each man forward in the way of faith and Christian endeavour.

We often hear of the difficulties of the Christian life, of its sore temptations and desperate conflicts, of the fleshly lusts we have to wrestle with, and the unruly tempers we have to subdue, and the wild, ungodly passion we have to hold down and keep in check. We are told about the overpowering seductiveness of the world and its pleasures, and the impossibility of throwing off the chains which gold and the love of gold forge around us, and the hopeless effort of walking daily through the corrupt moral atmosphere and environment without getting our spirits debased and losing all our higher thoughts and ideals. It is often spoken of as if the Christian life could not be lived, as if those who attempt it were engaged in a desperate undertaking, and as if all the chances were against us.

But surely talk of this kind is overdone. And it is not true, because it sees only the weaker side, and leaves out the greater truth. There are many things against us, but verily there are more for us. Yes, we have more helps than temptations, more inspirations than discouragements, more incentives than drawbacks. Does not every child's face

preach a gospel of purity to us? Do not most of the books we read tell us something of goodness and righteousness, and the beauty of well-doing, and the rewards which follow faithful service? Are we not compassed about by a cloud of witnesses in the memories of lives that have been lived worthily and have left lovely examples? Do we not hear in the very questions which our children ask, words which point us heavenward? Are there not in all our relationships, in the ties of home, and the obligations of affection, incentives to live upright, sober, and reverent lives? Is there not in all work honestly done something morally stimulating? Are there not, even in the sorrows, disappointments, and dark scenes of life, angel-forms that point their fingers upward? Does not every changing season prove to us God's faithfulness? And do not all the funerals we see moving on in their mournful procession speak to us of things beyond? And there are the Bible words which we can never forget, and the perpetual witness of conscience, and the promises which sing to us, and the warnings which make us thoughtful. There is the shadow of the Almighty over us, and the inspiration of Jesus' love, and the whispers of His presence within, and the visions of all that lies beyond the great mystery of death.

It is hard to be a Christian, you say? Yes, but it is almost harder still to put aside all these things and live as though they were not. We have much to fight against, but there is more fighting with

us and for us. The comforts of God are not few. The allies of the faithful, though invisible, are immensely real and mighty. "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."

THE PROTEVANGELIUM

By GEORGE MILLIGAN, D.D.

THE PROTEVANGELIUM

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."—GENESIS iii. 15.

IN the great Church of the Capuchins at Rome there is a famous picture by Guido Reni, of the Archangel Michael triumphing over the Evil One. The picture represents the Archangel clad in bright armour and holding in his hand a drawn sword, with one foot planted upon the head of Satan, who in the form of a dragon or serpent grovels and writhes beneath him. A sense of victory, not unmingled with defiance, shines on the Archangel's face: while Satan's every feature is distorted with suffering and hatred. And as we look at the picture, we can hardly fail to see in it the image, the representation, so often depicted, so earnestly longed for, of the final victory of good over evil.

What, however, to many at any rate, gives to this picture a peculiar interest, is the famous criticism passed upon it in a well-known modern work of fiction.[1] The Archangel—so it is there objected—

[1] Hawthorne, *Transformation.*

has come out of the contest far too easily. His appearance and attitude give no idea of the death-struggle which always takes place before vice can be overcome by virtue. His sword should have been streaming with blood: his armour dented and crushed: he should not have been placing his foot delicately upon his frustrate foe, but pressing it down hard as if his very life depended upon the result. The battle with evil is never such child's play as Guido's dapper angel seems to have found it.

Now, without attempting to decide how far in this particular case these strictures are just, there can be no doubt that they suggest what must ever be the attitude of mankind face to face with the power of evil; it must be an attitude of struggle—a struggle which in this world can never be said to end, and out of which the vast majority of mankind come with all the signs of warfare upon them. Victory over evil—but victory gained through watchfulness and toil—is not that what we find as we mark the struggle going on within us, around us?

And that, to come to our text, is the truth which is here taught us.

In the two earlier chapters of the Book of Genesis, we have been presented with a glowing picture of the state of innocence and happiness in which our first parents lived. But with this third chapter, there comes a change. The devil, under the guise of a serpent, is introduced upon the scene; and in a narrative which is still full of the deepest moral and

religious significance, we read how first Eve and then Adam fell under his power. But—and it is this point which specially concerns us just now—this triumph of evil is not to be allowed to go on unchecked. At the very moment when the devil seems to have gained the mastery, God announces his complete overthrow. The final victory will not rest with him. The seed of the woman shall crush him in his most vital part: "He shall bruise its head." And yet this result will not be reached without a long and hard struggle. It will be in the power of the serpent to vex and annoy and harass man: so that when he does at length reach the goal, he will be lame and worn and spent: "it shall bruise his heel." Again, you see, it is victory—but victory gained through suffering and toil.

Keeping, then, this before us as the general meaning of our text, let us look a little more particularly at three truths that underlie it. We have here: (1) A Gospel; (2) A Gospel of Conflict; (3) A Gospel of Triumph.

I.

We have here a Gospel—a message of glad tidings; for, viewed in the light of their context, the words of our text assure us that deliverance from evil is possible.

A great English theologian has said—and at first his words sound very strangely in our ears—that

"no view of the human state is so inexpressibly sad as that which leaves out the Fall."[1] Why, we ask, is it not just the Fall which has made our human state so sad? And no doubt when we think of the Fall as the origin and the cause of evil, it is. But what evidently Dr Westcott means is, that granted the present existence and power of evil, then the Fall comes in as the only hopeful explanation of it. For it reminds us that evil is not a necessary part of man's being, but foreign to it; and that as it was an enemy in rebellion to God who had been the means of making man sin, so by the destruction of that enemy, evil itself would be destroyed.

The same Divine voice which tells us how in the beginning God "created man in His own image," and "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," tells us that notwithstanding man's rebellion, the Spirit of God did not cease to strive with him, but in the very moment of his degradation and fall held out before him the promise of deliverance.

Well, then, has our text been called the Protevangelium—the first Gospel, the first of the long series of words and works by which God teaches us that His purposes towards us are gracious purposes; and that "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. v. 19).

[1] Westcott, *Social Aspects of Christianity*, p. 12.

II.

We have here not only a Gospel, but a Gospel of Conflict.

For if, as we have just seen, deliverance is possible, this deliverance, at least in its completeness, will come neither so quickly nor so early as we are often tempted to imagine.

Humanity, mankind—so an American preacher[1] has strikingly drawn out the figure—is a giant; but he is a giant with a wounded heel—"not running and leaping and shouting, often crawling and creeping in his pain, but yet brave, with an inextinguishable certainty of ultimate success, fighting a battle which is full of pain but is not desperate, sure ultimately to set his heel upon his adversary's head."

It is a picture the truth of which we have little difficulty in recognising. For as we look around us at the great conflict with which the world rings, is it not to trace on every side signs of mighty efforts and lofty hopes, but efforts and hopes which are for ever being weakened and blighted by the evil which is mingled with them?

Take, for example, the history of the Christian Church. Who is not at a loss sometimes to know whether to marvel most at the good which the Church has been able to accomplish, or at the evil

[1] Phillips Brooks, *Twenty Sermons*, vi.

within the Church which has prevented it from doing more? What are all our divisions, and envyings, and jealousies, and inconsistencies, over which unbelievers often make so merry, but the work of the serpent which is lying in wait in the path, to sting the heel of God's servants as they advance on their Christian pilgrimage?

Or, take the evidence of our own hearts. Is there one of us who can say that he finds it always easy to do what is right: or that even when he has set his face firmly towards the Celestial City, he finds all the old temptations and difficulties and trials removed for ever from his path? Is it not rather true that for him, as for Bunyan's pilgrim, there is continually an Apollyon "straddling quite over the whole breadth of the way," and doing his utmost by flattery, by deceit, yes, even by open violence, to turn him back? He learns, what Christian learnt, that not until he himself is sore wounded in head and hand and foot, and pressed almost to death, will the foul fiend spread his bat wings and fly away.

Still, as when the words were first written, we are called upon to "wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. vi. 12). Still, however much we may "delight in the law of God after the inward man," there is "another law in our members, warring against the law of our

mind, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin which is in our members" (Rom. vii. 22, 23).

It is the enmity of the serpent again, dogging man step by step, weakening his best efforts, clouding his fairest visions, crippling his holiest endeavours.

"When I would do good, evil is present with me"—that is still the general experience; until from us, as from St Paul, the cry is wrung: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 21, 24).

And yet for us, as for him, there is deliverance.

III.

We have here a Gospel which, while it is a Gospel of Conflict, is also a Gospel of Triumph.

We have been thinking as yet of the promise of our text only as applied to humanity at large; but let us not forget that it has already found its perfect fulfilment in the Risen Head of a new humanity, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Thus, in the very hour of defeat did God hold out the hope of brighter days to come—days that were reached when "in the fulness of the time" He "sent forth His Son made of a

woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. iv. 4, 5). The earthly life of Jesus Christ was one long struggle with the power of evil. He was Himself "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." He knew what it was to hunger and thirst, and to be weary. He "sighed deeply in spirit" as He marked the worldliness and the hyprocrisy of the men of His generation. He "wept" as He heard of the ravages of death, and saw the grief of those He loved. Ever throughout His life the serpent was close behind Him, stinging His heel, as for our sakes He pressed forward on the path of suffering, which was to lead to the Cross. And there might it not appear as if the power of evil had finally conquered? But it was in appearance only. Victory lay with the Crucified One. He saw of "the travail of His soul," and was "satisfied." And as we hear His dying exclamation, "It is finished," we catch in it the tones not of defeat, but of victory—

> "The great redemption is complete,
> and Satan's pow'r o'erthrown."

Into this redemption, this triumph, it is our privilege to enter. Christ's victory is our victory. In His death we die—die to the power of sin. In His life we live—live to holiness and to God.

You know what a constant tendency there is, even amongst good Christian people, to lose sight of the privileges which are really theirs, and which they ought to be enjoying now. How often when they are

sore pressed by temptation, or dispirited by disappointment or doubt, they long to escape from it all to that far-off land "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." They think that there, and there alone, can they find peace. And if by peace they mean "perfect peace," doubtless they are right. We cannot, under any circumstances, so we have just been learning, escape altogether in this world from toil and conflict and care. At the same time, even amidst these, let us hold fast by the victory that has already been won for us, the peace which is ours now. "This is the victory," says the beloved Apostle, "that overcometh the world"—(and the world he defines elsewhere as "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life")—"even our faith" (1 John v. 4). "In the world," so the Master Himself assured His disciples, "ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John xvi. 33).

The world, that is, is already a conquered foe. And those who are seeking humbly to follow Christ here, share not so much in His warfare as in His victory. There is a courage that is born of despair; there is a courage which comes from already assured triumph; and it is the latter, I need hardly say, that is the right of the soldiers of the Cross. "Lord," said the seventy joyfully, as they returned from their first missionary journey, "even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name." And He said unto them, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven"

(Luke x. 17, 18). That was the hope, that the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. xvi. 20)—that is our hope. "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. xv. 57)—that is our faith.

PEARLS IN THE VALLEY

By JAMES MOFFATT, D.D.

PEARLS IN THE VALLEY

"And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying: This is the way, walk ye in it; when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."—ISAIAH xxx. 20, 21.

"AND though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet"—adversity and affliction are not the last or deepest word on life. They are means to an end, and even while they last there are compensations. One thing balances another. As any success imposes certain penalties and drawbacks, which often lie invisible to the dazzled, outward eye, so the casual glance may fail to detect, under the grey mantle of adversity, something that to faith and sagacity helps really to justify it—some lasting, evident profit for the sake of which men will be more ready to endure humiliation or disappointment.

Isaiah does not promise an unbroken spell of fine weather to faith and faithfulness. Even penitence cannot avert all the consequences of some bygone infatuation. Yet judgment comes tempered with

mercy, and the special mercy here is that the discipline of being famished and hard pressed will beget a readiness to learn, a teachable spirit, some increase, it may be, of sincerity and conscience. Isaiah anticipates, in fact, a process of wholesome awakening for Jerusalem out of her torpor of pretence and levity. No longer will her best counsellors, the prophets of God, need to lie hid and lurk in corners. "Thine eyes shall see thy teachers," and—it is implied—be glad to see them, instead of resenting their reproofs or applauding the shallow, flattering advice of those who spoke smooth things. Truth will again become popular; honesty once more will be welcome. Furthermore, the moral judgment of the nation is to be quickened. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying: This is the way, walk ye in it." Penitence, that is, will clear the moral sense from its confusions and hesitations. Some experience of the valley will be an excellent corrective to mistaken notions about truth and error.

I.

In these chapters Isaiah, with an old statesman's breadth of outlook, is dealing with the prospects of the nation in view of Sennacherib's invasion of Judea.

Severity and sympathy are blended in his address. The capital, he declares, is to be reduced to

extremities by the Assyrian besiegers, thanks to the shortsighted and treacherous policy of the Jewish leaders. Yet, with the mellowed hope of old age, he proceeds to console the nation under its punishing experience by tenderly predicting that the siege suddenly will be raised and a golden age return, when once again the country will lie under crops in idyllic felicity, instead of being devastated by a foreign foe. Across the trouble he looked to a calm space beyond. He, at least, whoever might lose heart, could

> "So forecast the years
> And find in loss a gain to match,
> Or reach a hand through time to catch
> The far-off interest of tears."

Only, more is needed to reassure the mind. For while it is doubtless a genuine comfort to know that God one day will relieve the strain, and that joy comes in the morning, the stubborn question rises: "But what of the night?" What does the night mean? And how are we to get through it? That is the point. If adversity is part of our moral discipline, it cannot merely be something to be got over, like a stone in the road; some explanation of its presence must be forthcoming, and many a time one cannot endure it without understanding something about it. In the jolting disturbance, as well as beyond it, we must be able to find some trace and teaching of a Divine purpose.

II.

Now, Isaiah is thoroughly alive to this need, and that is the first, the general point of our text. For adversity there is a present compensation as well as a future relief.

One day, says the prophet to his people, and across the centuries to ourselves, one day you will be rid of all this discomfort. But the mere escape from trouble would not be enough for you. To get the full good of it, you must accept it from God, and find somehow in its grey yoke a reason and a reward. Before the welcome relief comes outwardly, some radical change is meant to pass over your entire temper towards God and life. For God is in this siege, the prophet urges. Amid all the straitened circumstances and harassing details, some Divine purpose is afoot, aiming to confound formalism and expose insincerity, to make the vanity and mischief of self-will evident, and to induce a humbler spirit. The judgment is a real mercy, or at least it may become so, if it is allowed to shatter false supports and hollow aims and self-complacent ease.

It may seem not a particularly creditable reflection on human nature to imply that it awakens to God under the twinges of sorrow oftener perhaps than under the kisses of prosperity, but, while trouble may be abused as easily as happiness, experience and history attest the truth of this old cure for the insolent and irresponsible life. How few can afford, morally speaking, to be comfortable for very long!

How easy it is to lose our balance, when the days are smooth and successful, to mistake the true significance and proportion of things, and to grow presumptuous! The uncertainties of life, after all, are sure allies of our piety, and still the bread of adversity and the water of affliction have their sobering part to play in the nurture of the soul. Still, many have to confess, the best learning-times are sometimes the days when we are made anxious, when life is straitened, when the household is shadowed, and when the heart is hardly pressed. Life is now and then furthered by being in some outward respect checked or stripped. Restriction and privation become severe opportunities of growth; they are our supreme opportunity of parting with pretensions, insubordinations, and levity—these hindrances of life which excite and swell it into weakness. Most of us get our losses and crosses, over and again; and although a few seem able to do without them, whilst others can do little or nothing with them, the call for us is to see that we get with them, as we are meant to get from the same hand of God, the teachable spirit and the humble conscience.

III.

The gift comes in two ways.

1. One habit, which is responsible for many a moral wreck on the high seas of life, is the insidious love of flattery. "Crows," said Epictetus pungently,

"crows pick out the eyes of the dead; but flatterers destroy the soul of the living and blind their eyes." For with the love of flattery, with the liking to consort with those only who speak smooth things and never render us uncomfortable and uneasy, there goes an impatience of reproof, and this renders people resentful of any advice which ventures to dispute their wisdom or challenge their authority. Judah was in that evil plight before the siege. Here was the supreme tragedy of an unteachable spirit. She had no ears to anyone except those who echoed her prejudices and flattered her passions. Whereas Isaiah anticipates one healthy outcome of the crisis will be a new openness to the truth. Misguided and infatuated, the nation is to be sharply taught that God cannot be ignored with impunity, that truth is not what we choose to see, but what we are meant to see, and that the best friends of a nation are not the amiable sycophants who are prepared to do and say anything except what might hurt her susceptibilities. "Thy teachers shall not be hidden any more." No longer sneered at or silenced, the genuine prophets will once more assume their place and exercise their functions in the community.

That is surely a great service, rendered to men often against their will. Adversity does open our eyes, if it is taken rightly. It exposes the false, and endears the true counsellors and friends of life. The day of trouble is a wonderful time for making scales fall from the eyes, and one sure proof that discipline

has begun to do its work is the growth of a readiness to hear the truth about ourselves, even though it may not be particularly palatable, and willingness to admit that we do require counsel and help from others, instead of maintaining a proud indifference to their authority and experience. "Thine eyes shall see thy teachers," and be very glad to see them. For then it is that the reliable friends, on whose riper wisdom it is our wisdom to lean, take their place in our life. We learn to consult them. We come to honour and respect them afresh. We are more ready to accept their verdicts and to listen to what they may feel it their duty to say upon our past and future.

And, like all tried and true advisers, they influence us by more than their mere words or presence. For, in our choices and decisions, we come instinctively to think of what they will think of us. Their approval becomes a standard for us. We frame our conduct in the light of their companionship, feeling ourselves in a sense held to virtue by their generous trust and hope. Our genuine friends, in short, become eventually a sort of second conscience, for the hopes which they entertain of us, as well as the counsels they may impart to us, save our lives from misguidance and infatuation.

2. "A second conscience," I say. But only a "second" conscience at the best. For, unless men are to be limp and helpless, mere parasites or echoes of a stronger nature, they must learn how to decide wisely for themselves, when they are nonplussed or baffled in the management of their lives. You can

easily see why. Many practical issues demand something deeper than reliance on good opinion or sound advice. And even when we act on the shrewd counsel of others to whom we have access, the responsibility remains our own. A friend at our elbow is not the highest ambition of the moral life. There must be some wider personal force of judgment, by means of which we grapple with the issues and evils of common affairs, and take our own course. Consulting other people is a poor equipment by itself for moral guidance. We must face the matter for and by ourselves. Life's disasters, be it remembered, are not entirely due to the misleading advice or influence of others. A man's own errors, the truant outbreaks of conscience, these form another factor in the case. These are responsible alike for mistakes and for the suffering which mistakes entail. So that, if life is to be put right and kept straight, conscience must be purified and strengthened. To the benefit of sound counsellors must be added the benefit of inward sincerity. To see, to have access to, the former is much. But, adds Isaiah, besides that, "when ye turn to the right hand and to the left"—at every turn, in each dilemma, as we should say—"thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying: This is the way, walk ye in it."

Such, we may well say, is Isaiah's simple and graphic outline of conscience as man's apprehension of his God in the ways and works of life. It is, he observes, like hearing a friend whisper over our

shoulder the right thing to do or the proper step to take. But petulance and complacency deafen the ear to this voice which is ever speaking with authority and wisdom to the soul, so that men come to misunderstand or to disobey it. Self-will confuses our moral instincts. The clamour of passion upsets our quiet sense of truth and right. Self-interest brings in conflicting echoes. And that is how some of the disasters in life arise. For no truth is more rudimentary, as none is apt to be less familiar, than this, that sound practical judgment is rooted deep in a man's character, and that the moral qualities of unselfishness and sincerity tell heavily in favour of sagacity in life's affairs. Oftener than we realise, perhaps, people break down and go wrong, not so much from an imperfect knowledge of the route or direction, as because at the outset the balance of their judgment has secretly been shaken by some fault like selfishness, or the love of pleasure, or moral obstinacy. The undisciplined man is his own worst enemy. His lack of self-control is a worse mischief to him than any defect of worldly wisdom.

And, as Isaiah shrewdly urges, one supreme use of being humbled or lowered is that we are brought to our senses. We get time to think. "All states are full of noise and confusion," said Bunyan; "only the Valley of Humiliation is that empty and solitary place. Here shall a man not be so hindered in his contemplation as in other places he is apt to be." Discipline and hardship are often meant by God to

rouse our sensitiveness. They should dispose us to listen and obey. It is one opportunity we get for being purged from waywardness and obtuseness, from all the extravagance and noisiness and scorn that dig the pits of moral ruin. For what is humility but submissiveness to the truth about ourselves? What is the teachable spirit but a willingness to face and follow God's will as that bears upon our common road?

And there is no superstition in it. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee." Isaiah is not thinking of some mysterious oracle or infallible outward authority, though even good men, craving for unerring aid, have yearned for such a guide through life's perplexities and have been tempted, now and then, in presence of their sore weakness, to purchase direction from an infallible Church or book, or from a spiritual director. Such mechanical resources, however, do but lower the moral tone. They enervate the conscience even when they profess to strengthen it. They are little more than a treachery to that harder and higher responsibility of training and obeying our conscience, till it becomes more and more a clear, accurate witness of God in the practical concerns and habits of our life. God guides with a word, a glance. His leading is not commonly compulsion laid upon the human soul. The process of guidance is through the discipline and development of our natures, not through any mechanical or artificial arrangement. What God offers us is a conscience to be trained in the light

and law of Jesus Christ. For it is both practical and positive. This God-given power is no mere protest against error, but a positive impulse to goodness, such as no external guide can ever be. Its word is: "This is the way." Here is your road. Nor is it abstract theory, but an inward pressure exerted on our faculties of choice and conduct. "This is the way: walk ye in it." Walk in it! Humility and enterprise are no more incompatible than zeal and modesty. Faith is a guiding oracle which assumes that life is never to be at a standstill, if men will but be sensitive to the highest revelation set before them in Jesus Christ. Obedience to Him confers a fine instinct for the truth and right. And in His presence, if we are but single-minded, we find ourselves invested with light and courage as we pick our way across this life.

IV.

"If we are single-minded." But that is just the point and knot of the whole business.

The serious thing about human life, after all, is not the mazes at our feet; it is the mists we bring over our inward vision. And here Isaiah's counsel keeps its truth for us. For all their apparent severity, his words assure us that we are not left to ourselves. To make us sensitive and sensible, it would seem that discipline is necessary sometimes; and, when we cannot or will not inflict it on our-

selves, God will. He knows when and where to send the adversity that trains us to hear and know His voice. It is not the only way for teaching us that lesson. Far from it. Rather it may be called one of God's last resources. But for some of us, and indeed for all of us at some stages, when the stupidity or the self-will of life gets the better of us, there seems no other way to quiet the froward heart for the voice of Christ and conscience than by shutting other voices out of life, until in the compulsory silence we are forced, forced and free and glad, to listen. So is it that God gets us to Himself. So is it that He rescues us from the proud heart that would defeat itself by scorning to be governed or guided.

There is no leading but for the straightforward, the modest, and the clean, and God will have us on that path of sincerity at any cost—even at the temporary cost of ease, though for a season we must bear the cold and the cloud. Anything to make us hear! Anything to keep us humble! It was of that Valley of Humiliation, where men get time to think, that Bunyan also wrote: "I must tell you that in former times men have met with angels here; have found pearls here; and have in this place found the words of life." May the former times return! May we too be of those who learn to prosper thus in the place and moment of humiliation, and who find that pearls are to be picked up there for the stooping!

THE PATTERN IN THE MOUNT

By J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

THE PATTERN IN THE MOUNT

"And look that thou make them after their pattern which was showed thee in the mount."—EXODUS xxv. 40.

THESE words close a chapter which I have not ventured to read to you. It is full of minute directions concerning the building and furnishing of a house. Details which have no live interest for us, because the house and its contents and all their religious symbolism have long since passed away. I only note this fact, that Moses had received his orders for the whole of the work. The house was for the highest service, and the design of it came from the highest source. It was not original. It was not a work of human imagination or genius. Its prototype and plan were in the heavenly places. In those many days which the great law-giver had passed on the mount, holding mysterious communion with the Unseen, God had showed him how all things were to be done both great and small, how the house was to be furnished with its ark and mercy-seat and cherubim, its tables and curtains and rings, its lamps and candlesticks, its incense and oil, its very bowls and dishes. The heavier things were to be

made of durable wood, and the more sacred things of pure gold; but all alike were to be shaped and carved and moulded after certain patterns which the Almighty Designer had given. This was the conclusion of it all: "Look that thou make them after their pattern which was showed thee in the mount."

And now we feel at once that this is an order which goes far beyond the building and furnishing of that ancient tabernacle. It would not be a misuse or abuse of the word if we were to apply it to the building of every house and the work of every workman. Surely it expresses God's thought of each human life, of each human family, of each church, and of every nation. It suggests certain lines on which He would have them develop, certain ideals which they should reverence and follow, and a certain perfection which they should never lose sight of though the attainment of it be always incomplete and still very far off. One can hardly think of any word which sums up more concisely and beautifully than this the rule and aim of Christian endeavour: "Look that thou make all things after their pattern showed thee in the mount."

I.

It is very certain that our lives and actions and thought will be moulded and shaped after some pattern, high or low, or perhaps a mixture of both.

We are all striving on lines not marked out by our own ingenuity but written down for us in the main by other hands. Few of us are originators. There is very little in us of the creative faculty. We do not coin our own money or fashion our own thoughts or dig stones for life's building out of our own quarry. We simply appropriate what is prepared for us, making our choice among the things high and low which are furnished by our surroundings. We are copyists and imitators, ever striving after certain patterns which are shown to us.

There are certain things we admire, and they determine the quality of our affections; there are certain things we covet, and they prescribe our strivings and ambition; there are certain things we reverence, and they supply the objects of our worship; there are certain things we love devotedly, and our hearts are shaped insensibly into their likeness. We look round as we enter into the thronging scenes of life, and almost unconsciously make our selection of the things which shall engage our thoughts and furnish the field of our exertions. We see men and women competing, wrestling, praying, and labouring

for diverse ends, some few with their faces set towards things noble, unworldly, and divine, and the great majority with the current of their thoughts rushing eagerly and furiously through lower channels. Here men are ordering their lives after the pattern given in some mount, and there they are working after the common pattern of the streets, going with the multitude after their covetousness or their pleasures. We see all this, and we gradually make our choice. Almost before we know it, we have fixed upon the patterns which are to be the models and guides of our lives.

In young life a great many of us hear a command given to us something like this: "Look that thou make all things according to their pattern showed thee in the mount." We hear it, and we are eagerly disposed to obey it: that is the chief glory of youth, that it aims high, not what the world calls high, but what God deems high. We have our generous purposes and pure ideals. We are resolved that we will not run with the crowd, but walk with the elect few. We covet earnestly the best gifts. We set before ourselves the palms of victory which the righteous win. We will keep ourselves unspotted from the world. We will not have our sympathies hardened by its keen and fierce competitions; we will not become enslaved either by its lust of pleasure or its lust of gold. Perhaps the vision of Christ breaks upon us as it burst upon the wondering gaze of the young disciples, and we declare that

it shall be the inspiring picture and morning star of our lives; or may be we read of those who have been the salt of the earth, of whom the world has not been worthy, and we vow that we will take sides with them, and share their labours, aspirations, and joys. It is all to be done after the pattern in the mount. And there are those, the undefiled few, who never lose sight of this high ideal: they never let down their wings. Their angel thoughts do always behold the face of the Father. They are not like the rest of us in whom the clay mixes so largely with the gold. They are the sweet souls who have the eternal beauty before them as an abiding vision, and never turn their backs upon it.

Alas, with most of us the pure and lofty hopes of youth get rudely handled and shattered in the rough experience of life. The pattern which we set before us is too delicate and too ethereal to be worked out by hands that lose all their fine touch in the common scrimmage and work of life. As we get on in years, there comes a sense of moral disappointment. We look back and see the ground strewn with broken ideals. We have found it harder to live a good and noble life than we supposed; and the dreams which we cherished of keeping ourselves pure and of pursuing elevated ambitions and devoting our lives to noble work, have melted away into the prosaic world of gross and commonplace realities. It may be that in other things we have succeeded beyond anticipation, that in wealth, position, and honour, we

have attained beyond our wildest dreams. But most of us have fallen short of our best moral ideals. We are not the men and women that we saw in the glass of youth's fair hopes, when the heart was beating with true purpose, and before it had known the spottings of the world. Even if we are taken at the very best, our work is strangely mixed; we have interwoven into our ideals a hundred things from coarser designs, and often failed altogether to strive after the pattern of things showed in the mount.

That is the story of our lives so far. What then? Are we to despair of the pattern because it has been found too high for human effort? Are we to abandon the ideal because it soars so far above our ordinary attainment? No! in spite of all failure and partial failure, this command is repeated every day.

II.

And every true man will take it up each day, with the acknowledgment that it is still binding upon him, and with a prayerful effort to realise it. "Look that thou make all things after their pattern which was showed thee in the mount."

That, my brethren, is the one thing which marks and separates the Christian soul from those who have no real faith and hope in God. He never lets go the pattern. He never throws down the ideal, treads

upon it, and passes contentedly to lower things. The world says: We are what we are, and it is only indulging in idle dreams to suppose that there can be any great change for the better. We are wretchedly imperfect, we know, but that is the inevitable human lot, and we must grimly resign ourselves to it. We had our ideals long ago, but they were broken and left behind like the toys of childhood. Poor, dear things! we can see them lying shattered all along the track of youth, and we pity them, and perhaps pity ourselves for letting them go; but they are done with and dead, and can never be to us again anything more than memories. That is what the world says. But the Christian man says: I hold to the ideal; I work after the pattern still. It is true, I am not the man I hoped to be—not yet; many an ideal that I cherished has been defaced and wounded in the hard battle of life; but I will not believe that those ideals are dead and buried for ever. Their faces will be restored; their beautiful forms will come to me again. I still hope to reach all that my best thoughts have pictured.

When a Christian ceases to feel in that way, then has he lost all the stimulus of Christ, and then are his moral and spiritual prospects dark indeed. For the only really sad and painful thing in the Christian life—the one unchristian thing, as we may call it—is the dropping or lowering of the high ideal, the practical abandonment of it, and the dull, resigned satisfaction with lower things. It may be humiliating

to feel that we have failed so far, that we have fallen miserably short of our best prayers and purposes. That may be humiliating, but it is a thousand times more humiliating to give up all the ideals, to shove them into the background of antiquated and forgotten things, and to declare, almost with a sneer, that they are quite unpractical and unattainable.

Beware of these two things, my brethren. Take care, first, that you do not bring yourselves to the conviction that the pattern shown in the mount is unworkable, or that it belongs to a region which ordinary human feet cannot scale. Do not excuse yourselves for making no attempts to climb, by sitting down at the foot of the hill and murmuring to yourselves and all passers-by: It is high; I cannot attain to it. At least, if you cannot ascend to the height, you need not fasten yourselves down at the base. Get a few steps higher. I hear you say the pattern is not for human beings. No mortal can copy it. How am I to love my enemies? How am I to love my unseen God better than I love my own child? How am I to do good to those who despitefully use me? How am I to forgive seventy times seven? How am I to bear my heavy cross without murmuring? How am I to rejoice in tribulation? How am I to do good, hoping for nothing in return? It is all impossible. My brother, that is just the way to make it impossible. Say it is hard, if you like! It is hard—every ideal is hard—you have to grow up to it by incessant prayer. But to declare that it never can

be done, is the confession of the faithless and the coward. One never does well even small things, unless he attempts the greater things; and all the great things die when one cheats himself with the words "We cannot."

And beware even more of this: that you do not fall into a contempt of those who pursue the ideals which you have abandoned. That, alas, is a too common thing. When we have given up striving after the higher pattern, the next lower stage we reach is to poke sneers at those who are still keeping before them the heavenly designs, as if they were altogether deluded and pitiable creatures. There are a few men and women in the world—there are always a few in the most unheroic age—whose lives are animated throughout by great and unselfish ideals. They do not care at all for the things which the crowd love; they have no ambition whatever to gain the prizes which most of us go mad after; they are not clever in the things of the world at all; you could outwit them at every turn; in business they would be hopeless failures; in money matters they are mere children; their thoughts are all given to the more ideal things; they strive for moral and spiritual ends; they lose themselves in missions, philanthropies, in saving work of all kinds; they follow Christ in high places far above your level; they work after the pattern which was shown in Galilee and on Calvary. And you call them faddists, dreamers, half-crazy people, and look

down upon them from your superior heights of practical wisdom. Superior heights! My brother, you can hardly get to a lower depth than that—to give up the pattern in the mount yourselves, and then laugh at those who are still noble enough to follow it.

No, let us at least reverence those who keep their eyes fixed upon the mount and strive after the higher things which we have forgotten. At least, do not flout and scorn what you are too earthly-minded to comprehend. Better still if we can all in a measure keep the ideals from fading out, if we can keep the vision of better things for ever before us, and refuse to believe that there is any province of life in which this order has no place: "Look that thou make all things after their pattern showed thee in the mount."

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